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HORATIO

Harley Rodney

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H O R A T I O

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Digby, Long & Co., Publlshers, London.

HORATIO

A Novel

BY

HARLEY RODNEY

AUTHOR OF 'HILDA: A STUDY IN PASSION'

London

DIGBY, LONG & CO.

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1899

HORATIO

I.

THE village of Dingymarsh is not an attractive place. In the midst of the Essex marshes, it is damp in winter and very hot in summer. The surrounding country is a dead level. Trees and hedges are scarce; a vast expanse of grass-land stretches out as far as the eye can reach.

Though it is within a few miles of London, and provided with an excellent train service, the most enterprising

speculator has not yet advertised a sale of building plots, with the usual free luncheon in a tent. The place is not suitable for the erection of villas, and the land has a certain value of its own. It is the last fattening place of stock for the London market. The inhabitants are all more or less mixed up with the butchery trade—drovers, graziers, dealers, importers, stout men of ample girth. Their tastes are not æsthetic; they feel no need of picturesque surroundings and the almost necessary refinements of modern life. They eat, they drink, they sleep, and for pleasure they have the Bar Parlour of the Fatted Ox. What more do they want?

And if Nature has not been bountiful of her amenities to their dwelling-place, nevertheless, their business has pros-

pered, and still prospers, and they are well known to be warm men.

The consumption of spirits per head of the population must go near to being a record. Whisky in the morning, whisky at noon, whisky in the evening; whisky to get up with, and whisky to go to bed with; such is their staff of life. But they do not seem to suffer. Fresh air and plenty of exercise counteract these continual doses of poison.

When the new Vicar came a few years back he tried to alter many things. He engaged a temperance lecturer to enlighten his people as to the error of their ways. The village rose to the occasion. They attended in their hundreds, and listened eagerly to their approaching doom.

According to the speaker, their di-

gestions were ruined, their stomachs were inflamed, their brains were rotting. Unappalled by this fearful prospect, they steadily refused to take the pledge, and the next day the Fatted Ox ran dry, so great was the demand for drinks.

There was one small arable farm in the place, and in the bad times its tenant had failed. As he felt himself sinking, he made more and more frequent visits to the Fatted Ox for support. His landlord gave out that if he had only kept sober he would have helped him to tide over his difficulties ; but it was hopeless to try to keep up a man who spent all his time in a Bar.

So the Tump Farm became vacant. Nobody would take it. Several Scotsmen came and looked at it, and sampled

the local whisky, and went away again. The owner thought seriously of trying to make it a building site. Unfortunately the Tump was nearly two miles from the station and village.

However, the unexpected happened. An unlooked-for tenant appeared.

Colonel Bloup, a retired military officer, wanted a house and some land where he could carry on experiments with explosives. He came down and saw the Tump, and took it on lease.

A new kind of inhabitant would be given to Dingymarsh. The Vicar hoped to have somebody with whom he could associate on equal terms. The ladies wondered whether there were a Mrs. Bloup and family.

The arrival of the Colonel was preceded by that of his establishment,

Sergeant and Mrs. Gripper, accompanied by two of Pickford's vans. Mrs. Gripper was a silent and repelling woman. She answered in monosyllables. She seemed incapable of a smile, and shrugged her bony shoulders beneath a crocheted tippet. She lived in a bonnet, an old black bonnet, which never came off. Probably she slept in it, but only the Sergeant could throw light on this interesting detail, and the Sergeant was evidently not a man to take liberties with, though he was affable and talkative, and quite ready to give information. He soon found his way to the Fatted Ox, and favoured the company there with all the knowledge of himself and his master that they cared to ask for. He let himself be treated, and he treated the others. He knew every

country under the sun, and had seen much active service. He marched and countermarched between the station, the Fatted Ox, and the Tump with erect carriage and dignified self-importance.

One evening in the summer the inhabitants were startled by a bright light in the direction of the Tump. As the light increased, they concluded that the house was on fire, and proceeded in groups to see what could be done. On their arrival a brilliant sight met their gaze. The grounds were illuminated, and the house and buildings shone with a phosphorescent glow. When a good number had assembled, they were treated to the best display of fireworks they had ever seen. High in the air appeared a fiery device, 'Bloup salutes Dingy-

marsh.' This was indeed a new way of introducing himself to the locality. The crowd broke into cheers. The display went on for twenty minutes; then 'Good-night' appeared in the same large letters, and all was darkness and silence. They went home to bed, some of the graziers hoping that their cattle had not been disturbed so as to interfere with the fattening process.

The Colonel kept himself very much to himself. From time to time explosions were heard as if he were practising shooting. Small boys broke into the grounds to get a better view, but were driven away by the Sergeant, who did not hesitate to use his stick with effect.

One day about dinner-time the whole village was upset. A terrific explosion

was heard. The fat cattle in the marshes ran wildly about, to the great detriment of their health. Many windows were broken ; the houses shook ; an old barn fell down. When they had recovered from their fright, some of the people ran towards the Tump to see if the Colonel had survived his work. They found him standing quietly at his gate. His windows were blown out ; his house was a wreck. He assured his neighbours that nobody was hurt, that the whole thing was due to the carelessness of Mrs. Gripper, who had disarranged some bottles, which had caused him to make a serious error in his chemical experiments. He deeply regretted the alarm and annoyance he had caused, and would give ample compensation for all material losses. The Colonel was as

good as his word, and the villagers were ready to let him destroy their property as often as he liked at the same price.

The Vicar had not given up his attempts at reform. He started penny readings and concerts, which were well patronized. His people were quite prepared to let him do his best. They liked to be amused, provided that they were not expected to improve. Some of the more ancient had made the objection that such entertainments took people's minds off the cattle, the only important object in life.

The Vicar had called on the Colonel, who, however, did not attend church, and was supposed to be a Roman Catholic. The Colonel offered to assist in the entertainments with a few conjuring tricks. The Vicar accepted with

eagerness, delighted to introduce any attractive novelty. The Colonel surpassed all expectations. After a few preliminaries well known everywhere else, he began some inventions of his own. He transferred the property of his audience from one to another and back again with extraordinary and alarming ease. He burned their pocket-handkerchiefs and returned them newly washed. He converted marbles into apples and brandy-balls into marbles. He caused a complete disappearance of Mrs. Gripper, who was sitting in the audience, and eventually reproduced her from his waistcoat pocket. His reputation spread far and wide, and at his next appearance the crowd was far too great to gain admission. The receipts became quite a substantial amount, and

the Vicar was provided with funds for all sorts of objects.

So the Colonel was a well-known and popular character, though suspected by many of dealing in the black arts, and being in league with the Evil One. He had an enemy, Miss Olroyd, the lady clerk of the post office, situated in the corner of a grocer's and draper's shop. He had called to despatch a telegram and was detained for ten minutes, while she finished an interesting conversation with one of her numerous admirers. The Colonel exercised exemplary patience and studied the newest Dingy-marsh fashions, until she condescended to attend to business ; but the next day a letter arrived from the General Post Office which caused a serious agitation. From that time she had treated the

Colonel and his affairs with a savage promptitude. He received numerous telegrams in mysterious language, but so also did the landlord of the Fatted Ox, who was addicted to racing pursuits.

The office possessed one telegraph messenger, who had an easy time, except on market and race days, and was able to devote his leisure to the cultivation of a moustache. Miss Olroyd addressed him as Tommy, and treated him with cold scorn, but he was not without hope that when the moustache showed signs of development she would pay more attention to his frequent compliments. The Colonel's telegrams were viewed unfavourably by Tommy. He disliked exercise, and did not find the Tump an amusing place. Mrs. Gripper

treated him with scant courtesy, and the Sergeant drove him away if he attempted to rest himself too long. However, the Colonel, when on view, was generally good for a penny or twopence.

On a hot morning in July Miss Olroyd was interrupted in her perusal of an exciting penny novelette at the precise point where the Viscount was about to run away with the scullery-maid, the long-lost child of a Duke of prehistoric ancestry, by the necessity of receiving a tiresome telegram for the Colonel, 'Cabbage Plaice Snails.' She wondered what it could mean. She had never heard of eating cabbage with fish, but thought the Colonel quite capable of making snails part of his diet. Tommy was called away from

the looking-glass, and set out in a leisurely manner towards the Tump. He took several rests on the road, and joined in a game of cricket for a quarter of an hour. The Colonel was at home. As he read the message he looked seriously at the clock. He called for the Sergeant and announced his intention of starting immediately for London. He attired himself in a black frock-coat and a high hat of a somewhat ancient shape, and, accompanied by the Sergeant, who marched at a respectful distance in the rear, made his way to the station. He took a first-class ticket for himself and a second for the Sergeant, and in due course they were deposited at Fenchurch Street. The Colonel had been in many battles, and had conducted experiments of the most daring kind,

involving possibilities of instant annihilation ; but he had his weak points. Nothing would induce him to drive in a hansom. He engaged a four-wheeler with a very ancient horse and a gray-haired and red-nosed driver, and, the Sergeant having mounted the box, they made a slow progress through the crowded streets to the office of the Board of Explosives in Whitehall. He was well known to the porter, who ushered him without delay into the private room of Sir Marmaduke Males-troit the chairman.

Sir Marmaduke was a big, stout man of imposing presence. He was unmarried, and lived principally at his club. He was a frequenter of dinner-parties, but never accepted invitations to country houses ; he did not hunt or

shoot. He had a horror of firearms, and knew absolutely nothing of explosives. This ignorance did not necessarily impair his efficiency, his principal duties being the control of an official staff and the regulation of military stores.

Sir Marmaduke was evidently much perturbed. He turned over the papers before him in an eager and excited manner. His life, official and social, had been an easy one. His staff were not difficult to manage, and whatever difficulties did arise were settled by the Principal Clerk. He seldom had to interfere himself.

But now a most untoward event had happened. He feared that a serious scandal in his department could hardly be avoided. The Colonel, after much

labour and many dangers, had invented a new and very powerful explosive. The secret was known only to three or four persons. A small bottle containing the new substance had disappeared. It had been stolen from the Office, and Sir Marmaduke had received secret intelligence that it had found its way to the laboratory of a foreign Government. As the Colonel entered, Sir Marmaduke rose from his chair and shook hands.

‘Good-morning, Colonel Bloup,’ he said. ‘I telegraphed to you at once. A most unfortunate thing has occurred. The bottle you left here last week has been stolen, and I gather from certain information I have received that it has fallen into the hands of foreigners.’

Colonel Bloup sat down, and placed

his hat on the floor and his handkerchief in his hat. Such manners provoked a slight look of disdain from Sir Marmaduke ; but the Colonel was for use, not for ornament.

‘It is unfortunate, as you say, Sir Marmaduke,’ said the Colonel. ‘I hardly think that the consequences will be as serious as you anticipate. Probably the bottle will reach my friend Kikankuffer, a very able chemist.’

‘And I suppose he will analyze the contents and find out how the substance is made,’ said Sir Marmaduke.

‘No doubt that will be his object,’ said Colonel Bloup ; ‘but it is not an easy one to attain. Kikankuffer is a very able chemist, as I said, but it is most unlikely that he will succeed in his analysis. I should say that he will

adopt certain preliminary measures which will produce results more startling than pleasant.'

'I do not quite follow you,' said Sir Marmaduke. 'Do I understand you to mean that the substance presents unusual difficulties of analysis?'

'It does present difficulties, Sir Marmaduke,' said the Colonel—'serious difficulties; because an attempt to analyze it in the usual way will certainly cause an explosion. Unless my friend is more careful and more skilful than I suppose, it is highly probable that he will destroy the contents of the bottle and himself as well.'

Sir Marmaduke looked relieved, though somewhat alarmed. Did not ordinary humanity require him to warn even an enemy of the danger he was risking?

‘In that case we ought surely to indicate the danger you suggest,’ he said. ‘Perhaps we could regain possession of the bottle.’

‘I should not advise such a course,’ said the Colonel coolly. ‘It is Kikan-kuffer’s affair to know his own business. I myself caused several hundred pounds’ worth of damage at Dingymarsh by a similar attempt. Kikankuffer is an able man, and he will be a great loss to science, but he ought to know his own business. I had the pleasure of meeting him at a congress last year, and he entertained me very hospitably. Personally I shall regret him.’

Sir Marmaduke felt a natural horror at so callous a way of regarding a sudden and terrible death, which it might be possible to prevent. The difficulties of

the case seemed to increase, and he did not know what to do. Of course he must trace the theft. After all, perhaps, his own duty began and ended there.

‘If I may presume to advise,’ said the Colonel, ‘I should let matters take their course. Probably the evening papers will contain an account of the explosion. I feel sure that the analysis will not succeed, and I only hope that Kikankuffer may escape with his life, though I do not expect it. Most likely it will all end in smoke, as the saying is. We must be more careful in future not to let the stuff get about. Surely your staff ought to be trustworthy ; they know enough without my invention to do plenty of mischief.’

‘I cannot at present understand how this abuse has happened,’ said Sir

Marmaduke ; ‘ but of course inquiry will be made.’

‘ If I can be of any assistance, I am quite at your service,’ said the Colonel. ‘ In the meantime I should like to use the opportunity of being in London to do a little shopping. I shall have the honour to call again this afternoon, if you think it would be desirable.’

The Colonel took his departure accompanied by Sergeant Gripper, who had occupied a seat in the Official hall during his master’s interview with the chairman.

Sir Marmaduke rang the bell, and told a messenger to request Mr. Hopkins to come to him. Hopkins was the clerk whose special duty it was to assist the chairman ; Mr. Peasancues, the Principal Clerk, an official of the old school, declined to be troubled with

details and routine work. But the messenger returned and informed Sir Marmaduke that Mr. Hopkins was absent, taking a day's vacation. Sir Marmaduke thought for a moment, and then gave directions to telegraph to Mr. Hopkins' private address and desire his immediate presence at the office.

So far as he knew, only four persons were in the secret : himself, the Colonel, Hopkins, and Peasancues. How the bottle had been stolen he could not imagine. He had locked it up himself, and it had disappeared. Had some spy been watching the Colonel and followed him to the office ? But if so, how could any outsider have obtained admission to Sir Marmaduke's room ? The lock was all right, and had evidently not been tampered with. There must be a traitor

somewhere. It was not himself, and it could not be the Colonel. Mr. Peasancues was a Primitive Methodist, who despised aspiration, and lived at Clapham. He was the very last person likely to betray official secrets. There only remained Hopkins. Was it possible that he could be the guilty person?

Sir Marmaduke had good reason to know that Hopkins was not troubled with scruples, but this was a different matter to ordinary official tricks. Was it possible that a well-mannered and gentlemanly young man of great intellectual attainments, who had been at Eton and Oxford, could have committed so great a crime? It seemed quite incredible. He would interview Hopkins, and hear whether he could throw any light on the matter. Sir Marmaduke's

great desire was not so much to punish the offender as to escape a scandal. He knew that what are officially called 'grave irregularities,' could not always be avoided. The really important thing was to prevent them becoming known and getting into the newspapers. So he had his luncheon, and waited for a reply to his telegram ; but no reply came, and Hopkins did not put in an appearance.

Late in the afternoon the Colonel called again, and brought with him an evening paper.

'As I predicted, Sir Marmaduke,' he said, 'my friend Kikankuffer has destroyed himself. Here is an account of the explosion.'

He handed the paper to Sir Marmaduke. It contained a brief statement, that the well-known chemist, Professor

Kikankuffer, while at work in his laboratory, had accidentally caused a serious explosion which had wrecked the building, and caused the deaths of the Professor and two assistants, and serious injuries to several other persons. Then followed a long account of the life and works of the deceased.

‘It is a great loss to science,’ said the Colonel. ‘I deeply regret it. Chemistry is a dangerous pursuit, and people should be careful, Sir Marmaduke ; they should be careful, and not meddle with what they do not understand.’

The Colonel’s feelings were evidently divided between regret at the loss of his friend and pride at his own superior skill and knowledge.

Sir Marmaduke was displeased at such an indecorous way of regarding so

terrible a catastrophe, but he could not help showing some relief that the new discovery was safe, and that no scandal need now arise.

‘ I presume,’ he said to the Colonel, ‘ that under the circumstances we need not fear the consequences of this extraordinary robbery. I am investigating the matter, and, although we must of course clear it up, I hardly think we need let it go beyond ourselves.’

‘ Certainly not,’ said the Colonel ; ‘ it would be useless and most undesirable to let it be known. I regret to hear that my young friend Mr. Hopkins is away to-day. I had intended to ask for the pleasure of his company at dinner. I have not seen much of him since his marriage, which, as you are probably aware, was not one to meet with the

approval of his friends, But he has been civil to me on many occasions, and I hoped to have an opportunity of renewing our acquaintance.'

Sir Marmaduke did not think it necessary to confide his suspicions of Hopkins to the Colonel, nor did he think it desirable to manifest any interest in his clerk's domestic affairs ; so he brought the interview to an end, and the Colonel returned to Dingymarsh.

In the summer evenings the Colonel was much troubled by the village school-boys, to whom his pursuits offered an irresistible attraction. They were too quick for Sergeant Gripper, and it was really dangerous to have them running about a place which was full of mines and batteries. The Colonel had resolved to try the effect of a good fright.

On his arrival at the Tump, he perceived that twenty or thirty small boys had invaded his property, where he had previously laid a mine for their special benefit. He and the Sergeant pretended to be much occupied a quarter of a mile off. The youngsters were sitting on some railings in hopes of obtaining amusement. Suddenly the Sergeant turned round and put his hand to his forehead to shade his eyes. He pretended to see the unwelcome spectators for the first time, and waved frantically to them to go away. The Colonel also gesticulated furiously, as if to indicate they were in serious danger. They had just time to become alarmed, when the Colonel exploded his mine almost under their feet. The railings went to pieces, the earth was dug up and scattered

about ; the small boys fell in a heap upon the ground, and lay there howling with terror. Most of them thought they were killed. Of course, they were in no way injured, beyond the effects of a fall from a four-foot railing. The Colonel had arranged for plenty of noise and smoke, and a great deal of dust.

He and the Sergeant arrived on the scene before the enemy had time to recover themselves. The Colonel with great gravity told them that they had had a most fortunate escape, that they were trespassing in spite of all his warnings, and that he was very much inclined to send for a policeman and have them all locked up. But they were so terrified and upset that he had compassion on them, and took them to his house to be brushed down, and gave them a lot of

fruit out of the garden to restore their drooping spirits. After this he hoped to be left in peace. He did not wish to be observed while he was putting the finishing touches to his new invention.

II.

HORATIO HOPKINS had lived a strange and varied life. He was left an orphan at the age of seven, and was taken charge of by an Uncle, the only relative he possessed, so far as he knew. His Uncle had no permanent residence. He spent his time in perpetual travel. What his business exactly might be was not very apparent. He generally seemed to have ample funds at his disposal.

Horatio was a pretty little blue-eyed boy with golden curls. His Uncle treated him very kindly, but evidently found him a serious embarrassment, so he was

at once sent to school. He was the youngest boy, but he was so gentle and good-tempered that even the brutality of the small boy shrank from hurting him. The schoolmaster soon reported to his Uncle that Horatio was a very clever boy. He learned things with the greatest ease. The Latin and Greek grammars had no terrors for him. At a very early age he showed an extraordinary facility in Latin verse. His master felt sure that he would easily gain a scholarship, if his Uncle thought fit to send him to a public school. Some of his holidays he spent at school, and sometimes he was boarded with a family; only occasionally his Uncle took charge of him. Then he visited many foreign spas and health resorts. His Uncle encouraged him to pick up acquaintances,

which he easily did. But often they would leave suddenly in the early morning, and take a long journey to a distant place, where they might stay two days or a month.

He did not try to understand it all; he knew that he was not the same as other boys, with fathers and mothers and homes. He took everything just as it came, and did not trouble himself. When he was fourteen he was high up in the Tuggery, or College, examination at Eton. His Uncle wrote him a letter of congratulation, and enclosed a five-pound note.

While at a small school he had been encouraged to work, and had worked fairly hard. The easy-going state of things at Eton had a demoralizing effect. He became thoroughly idle, and gave

himself up to all the pleasures of the place. He was too small and delicate to be a brilliant success at games. Nevertheless, he found plenty of amusement. He played fives and rackets, and went in for steering in the boating season. He was a fast runner, and did not do badly at football with boys of his own size.

He became a very popular Tug, though most of his friends were Oppidans. He was a trial to the masters; for he had been so well grounded, and was so clever by nature, that he did his work with ease when he chose to do it at all. But he was incorrigibly idle, and took no trouble to prepare his lessons.

He seemed to have no idea of right and wrong. He lied in the most unnecessary manner, and on all occasions

when it suited his immediate convenience. If he laid up a store of future trouble, he faced it calmly when the time came. He bore his punishments with meekness but they failed to produce the slightest effect. He borrowed money, and got into debt whenever he had the chance; he never denied himself anything that he could by any means obtain.

It was no use to scold him or preach at him. He opened his blue eyes, and pushed back his golden hair from his face, and said he was sorry, and then did it again.

At eighteen he got a scholarship at Oxford. As he grew older, his Uncle showed less and less desire for his society, although he would spend a week with the boy at some seaside place from time to time. He thought it neces-

sary to offer some not very satisfactory explanations as to his peculiar mode of life, which were thrown away on Horatio, who did not believe them, and who did not care in the least what reasons might govern his Uncle's movements.

At Oxford he was completely happy. He had his scholarship and an allowance which he treated as pocket-money. He took full advantage of the facilities for credit which surrounded him. He lived with his Eton friends, some of whom were rich, and most of whom were extravagant. He was now supposed to be old enough to take care of himself, and he passed his vacations wherever he liked.

The Vice-Principal of his College, a fussy little man with the worst Oxford manners, thought fit to suggest more work and less noisy parties.

‘ You should remember, Mr. Hopkins, that you are a scholar, not a commoner. You are a stipendiary, you know.’

‘ So are you,’ said Horatio, with some heat, ‘ only you get ten times as much as I do.’

This retort did not mend matters, and Horatio was in bad odour with the College authorities. However, he got his first and landed a big prize, so the College forgave him and patted him on the back.

Then a serious calamity fell upon him : his Uncle disappeared. Horatio thought he must be dead. He had heard nothing of him for six months, and no remittance had been sent to the Bank. Horatio had accumulated a huge amount of debt, and his creditors began to press him very seriously. He was obliged

to clear out of Oxford to get away from them, and he did not quite know how to live.

He confided his difficulties to some of his friends. His chief friend, Lord Huntingbox, could not give him much pecuniary assistance, as he was extravagant and always hard up. George Blinkins was very rich ; but, though he tolerated Hopkins because he was in his set, he did not like him. He cared only for games and sport, and Hopkins was not much of a sportsman ; however, he was good for a loan of twenty pounds. Francis Bernard listened with sympathy, and did what he could to help. He really liked Hopkins by the attraction of opposites. He had been a sturdy, full-blooded boy at Eton, and was rough and noisy, but not given to extravagant

amusements at Oxford ; he was the most serious friend that Hopkins possessed.

These levies would not carry him far, and it became very necessary to find an occupation.

It was true that he had taken a first, but he was not good at cricket or football, and was not conventional in his ideas or habits, so that he would hardly be a success as a schoolmaster. He had been in for one Fellowship examination, but was cut out by an unshaven product of Balliol and Manchester Grammar School.

He went up to London and looked about, and had a very bad time of it. He was snubbed by people to whom he applied for employment, and Horatio was sensitive and not accustomed to be

snubbed. His valuables went to the pawnbroker, and he was nearly at his wits' end. In spite of his brilliant attainments, he was as helpless as a baby ; he was quite unprepared by his education to face the hardships of life. His spirits began to give way ; he did not see how in a few more days he would be able to get any food. He walked slowly along Piccadilly on the chance of meeting somebody who would give him a dinner. He would like a good dinner ; he might feel better after that, and more able to face his difficulties. He turned into the Park, and sat down and watched the people. His melancholy reflections were interrupted by a stranger, a tall man well dressed—rather too well dressed.

‘ Surely it is Horatio Hopkins,’ he

said. 'You have grown since we last met. How is your Uncle?'

'I have not heard of him for months,' said Horatio wearily; 'I do not know where he can be. When did you see me before?'

'You were with your Uncle at Havre,' said the stranger. 'Don't you remember dining with me at Frascati's?'

Horatio worked his memory, and evoked some kind of recollection of the dinner.

'And what are you doing now?' said the stranger. 'You do not seem to be very bright.'

Horatio thought that any straw is good enough for a drowning man, and proceeded to explain his unpleasant position.

The stranger listened with attention, and expressed his sympathy.

‘Do not be downhearted,’ he said ; ‘things will take a turn for the better, I hope. You may as well dine with me. I shall be leaving town to-morrow, and if I get any news of your Uncle, I will be sure to let you know. He must be somewhere, and I expect he will turn up again before long.’

The stranger offered a cigar, a very good cigar, and he and Horatio strolled in a leisurely way towards the Strand.

They went into Simpson’s, and had a substantial meal and a bottle of champagne. Horatio felt better already, and wondered whether the stranger would be good for a loan. After coffee and more conversation, the stranger suggested a move.

‘I suppose you do not know London very well,’ he said—‘I mean the inside of London. I know every bit of it. We might look in at the Empire for an hour, and then I will take you to a supper-room, which will amuse you.’

Horatio did not know the inside of London at all. He thought the Empire rather a bore, but took care not to say so.

After an hour or so they went out, and the stranger led the way into a small street near Regent Circus. They arrived at a house apparently shut up for the night. The stranger rang the bell, and the door instantly opened, and let them into a passage with another door in front of them.

‘Is Mr. Parry at home?’ asked the stranger.

‘No, sir,’ said a voice through a hole in the second door; ‘he has gone to Manchester.’

‘And then he will go to Aberdeen,’ said the stranger.

The second door at once opened and admitted them to a large room, round which coats and hats were hanging on pegs. The doorkeeper relieved them of their hats, and they went upstairs.

‘You see,’ explained the stranger, ‘this is what is called a night club, and they do not want to be bothered by the police, so they are obliged to have a password and two doors.’

On the first-floor were several rooms. Supper was laid in one, and the others seemed to be given up to gambling. Roulette and other games were in full swing, and were familiar to Horatio,

who had seen them in his travels with his Uncle.

A number of men were engaged in play. They were the usual sort of gamblers, some of them pale and eager, and some of them flushed and excited ; some were smart, and some were shabby. All were intent on their absorbing pursuit.

Horatio had been to Monte Carlo, and thought it looked like the same kind of thing on a smaller scale. Any stakes were allowed, from a shilling upwards.

Horatio risked a few shillings, which he could ill afford to lose ; but his luck was in that night, and he increased his small stock of money to quite a considerable sum. In the meantime his companion had disappeared. The supper

was apparently free to all comers, and Horatio took the opportunity of having another meal. After this he was thinking of going out, when he was accosted by a short stout man with a foreign accent.

‘Your friend has gone away and left you behind, I see,’ he began. ‘I hope you have enjoyed the evening. If you have the time, I should like a few minutes’ conversation with you. Will you come into my private room?’

Horatio did not much like the man’s looks, but he thought that he might as well find out what he wanted. He was hardly worth robbery and murder in his present state, so he need not be afraid. The little man led the way to a small room luxuriously furnished, where he made Horatio seat himself in a comfort-

able armchair, and produced cigars and whisky and seltzer.

‘ My young friend,’ he said, ‘ the excellent gentleman who was with you just now is well known to me. He likes to amuse himself here from time to time. I also have the honour to be slightly acquainted with your respected Uncle. I understand that you have not recently had news of him. I hope sincerely that you will again see him before long. At present you are in a difficult position, and I have asked you to come in here because I am of opinion that we may be of use to each other. What I mean to say is, that we might be able to make a business arrangement to our mutual advantage. You see, my friend, that this establishment of mine is not easy to manage. There are the stupid

English laws, and a danger of trouble with the police, so that we can only do business in the most secret manner and with many precautions. Now, there are in this big city of London many young noblemen and gentlemen who would like to try their luck and to amuse themselves. But how are they to know that such an establishment as mine exists for their amusement? To introduce any stranger here is always a danger; he may be a policeman in disguise. I do not pretend to carry on this house for nothing. There is a profit on the games; there are certain chances in favour of the house. This is well known, and is all fair. Nobody who comes here is cheated, nobody is robbed; all is right and straightforward.

‘You are a young gentleman with

many rich friends, but for the moment you are short of money. I offer you a sovereign for every new client you introduce to the house. Think it over, my young friend—think it over. If you accept my offer, you may be able to get through the time until your Uncle comes back. I am sure he will come back in time, if you can have patience; but in the meanwhile you must live, my young friend, you must have lodging and nourishment, and that costs money. Think over my offer.'

For the first time in his life some hazy idea of morality arose in Horatio's mind.

In plain words, this man was asking him to become a tout for a gambling hell, to persuade his friends to go there and lose their money. Horatio was the

last person to be particular. He had boasted of having no religion and morality, and not wishing to have any. At Oxford he had been asked to subscribe to the Bible Society, and had horrified the collector by saying that he could not afford to subscribe, but he would give them his old Bible, for which he had no further use. Everybody draws the line somewhere, and even he realized that, if he accepted this suggestion, he would sink very low indeed.

The little man saw his hesitation and was not surprised at it.

‘Take your time, my young friend,’ he said. ‘You can go home and think it over; you need not answer me to-night. I will give you a list of passwords, and if you have an opportunity of bringing me a client in the course of

a few days, you can do so, and the sovereign is yours every time. There are other businesses to which I might introduce you. I have friends who make loans to gentlemen who need money, and who have rich relations or some position. If you could introduce business, I am sure they would give you a liberal commission, a very liberal commission. Here is a card with my private address, where you can write to me any time, and here are the passwords for two weeks.'

Horatio took the cards after a slight hesitation. The one was inscribed :

MR. EPHRAIM NEWMAN,
Commission Agent,
 390, *Half-Moon Mansion.*

The other contained a list of numbers

corresponding to the days of the month, with names of places opposite them.

As he walked back to his modest lodgings, he began to think over things. What could have become of his Uncle? Was it not possible that he also might be engaged on some of the businesses suggested by Mr. Newman? He remembered their journeys when he was a small boy: the constant billiards and cards, his Uncle's pleasant manners, and his facility for picking up new acquaintances, his rapid movements from place to place. His Uncle had even made use of him as a means of introduction. A small boy was an unusual kind of visitor at many of the places which they frequented, and consequently attracted attention. People asked him questions, which his Uncle



took care to answer in his own way. He remembered some of his Uncle's friends, good-natured men, who gave him sweets and pocket-money. In the light of later knowledge he could see that they were not of the same type as his own school and college friends, and their relations. Perhaps his Uncle had got into trouble, and found it necessary to disappear.

He did not feel the slightest annoyance or uneasiness at these ideas. He had very little notion of honesty, and one way of living seemed to him as good as another. He had made a few pounds that evening, and would be able to give his landlady something on account; and that was important, as she was becoming impatient, and he might be turned out if he kept her

waiting much longer. He had been obliged to soothe her by talking of remittances to come and by discreet compliments. She was a middle-aged woman, who wore bright colours, and still pretended to attractiveness, and Horatio was so civil and well-mannered, and so good-looking, that he had acquired a certain influence over her. If he paid her a little on account, he could probably be sure of a roof over his head for some weeks to come. Still, he was in a desperate state, and he could not go on like this much longer.

A few days afterwards he had spent most of his money, and was getting near to his last shilling once more. It so turned out that he met his friend Lord Huntingbox as he was walking in the



Park. He liked to go to the Park and watch the people ; it was cheerful, and cost nothing. Lord Huntingbox inquired how he was getting on, and Horatio was obliged to confess that he was not getting on at all.

‘ Come and dine with me, then,’ said Lord Huntingbox, ‘ at the Nocturnal. I have just been made a member. It is a nice free-and-easy club, and suits me. We must really try to do something to put you on your legs. It is too bad of your Uncle to disappear like this and leave you with no money. I am always hard up, you know, as my revered parent thinks it is not good for me to have too much pocket-money, but he generally comes up to the scratch at last. He has paid off most of my bills after a terrific row.’

At the Nocturnal they met several other Oxford friends, and, having dined somewhat late, they did not know where to spend the rest of the evening. It was too late for the theatres and music-halls, and they did not feel at home in the club, which was new to them.

Horatio saw his chance. A fiver was staring him in the face, if only he could discreetly pilot them into Mr. Newman's establishment. He turned the conversation to Monte Carlo, and luck, and cards, and it did not require much persuasion to induce five foolish young men to accompany him to a mysterious, and therefore attractive, gambling place.

It was only a few minutes' walk to Regent Circus. Horatio looked at his card as he rang the bell. The outer door opened at once as before.

‘Is Mr. Parry at home?’ said Horatio.

‘No, sir; he has gone to Manchester,’ said the voice through the hole.

‘And then he goes to Swansea,’ said Horatio, that being the password given on the card.

The inner door was opened as before, and the six friends entered.

Mr. Newman was overlooking his business from a retired position in the background; as he saw Horatio and his companions he smiled complacently. Horatio had done well; a haul of five all at once was very good work. Nobody tried to induce them to play. They could look on if they liked, or visit the supper-room if so disposed. Drinks and cigars were freely supplied. But it was not long before the attraction became irresistible, and they were soon

seated at a table trying their luck. Instead of losing, most of them gained, and Horatio began to wonder how Mr. Newman proposed to make the business pay. But Mr. Newman looked on with a satisfied air, and Horatio thought that his fiver was safe. He knew that it would not be desirable to claim acquaintance in the presence of his friends. He himself risked a few shillings for the sake of doing like the others. As the night wore on and they did not seem inclined to move, he told them that he was getting tired and would go to bed, but of course they could stay as long as they liked. They were too intent on their operations to pay much regard to him, so he went out and left them to the tender mercies of Mr. Newman. The doorkeeper gave him

an envelope which enclosed a five-pound note and an invitation to luncheon with Mr. Newman the next day.

He went to bed well satisfied with himself. He had not done much harm to his friends, and had gained a very useful reward. When he presented himself at Half - Moon Mansion he was taken up by a lift to the third floor, and found himself in a luxurious flat. The anteroom, which was apparently Mr. Newman's place for interviewing strangers, was furnished in sumptuous but severe style, and ornamented with engravings of prominent politicians and busts of scientific and literary celebrities.

Mr. Newman appeared, attired in a padded silk dressing - gown, with an embroidered cap hiding his baldness,

and greeted Horatio with fervour. He ushered him into an inner room with gorgeous hangings and thick carpets, and pictures of ladies in demi-semi-toilette and operatic stars and race-horses, and singing birds and flowers in profusion.

‘Ah, my young friend,’ he said, ‘you have begun business very well ; you have brought in five clients at once. Well done, my young friend, very well done !’

‘I am afraid they were not very profitable,’ said Horatio ; ‘they were winning, not losing, when I left them.’

‘But that is no matter,’ said Mr. Newman, rubbing his hands—‘that is no matter. They will come again, and will bring their friends. In the long-run I make my money—in the long-run.

There are always so many chances in my favour, I gain in the long-run.'

A ring at the bell was heard, and a servant announced Mr. Moses Abrahams, a bejewelled and magnificent person of decidedly Hebrew appearance.

'My young friend, I introduce you to my friend Mr. Abrahams,' said Mr. Newman. 'He is the senior partner of Morrison and Co., a firm of financial agents. It is possible that you may be able to do business with the firm, and you will find that they will be liberal in their commission—very liberal in their commission.'

Mr. Abrahams beamed benevolently upon Horatio.

'Ten per cent.,' he said—'we give ten per cent. on all business introduced to us. If we do business to the amount

of a thousand pounds, you get a hundred. That is better than our friend Newman's commission, is it not ?'

Mr. Newman did not seem to mind this disparagement.

'We do what we can,' he said ; 'but our business is different, and is not so remunerative. Do not forget Morrison and Co., my young friend—Morrison and Co., of Haymarket.'

They sat down to an excellent luncheon, washed down with first-rate burgundy. Newman and Abrahams were in high good-humour, and made themselves agreeable to Horatio according to their lights.

'If you should think of marriage, my young friend,' said Abrahams, at the confidential stage of coffee and liqueurs, 'I might be able to introduce you to

a lady of means. A handsome young man like you should make the most of his advantages. I will look out for a suitable lady. Of course you will give the usual commission, ten per cent., my young friend—ten per cent.'

Horatio had no immediate desire to mend his fortunes by marriage. He disapproved of marriage in general, and did not want to be tied to a troublesome female ; but he thanked Mr. Abrahams for his well-meant offer of assistance, and after many injunctions from Newman to introduce new clients to his establishment at a 'sovereign every time, my young friend—a sovereign every time,' he went to air himself as usual in the Park.

Unfortunately the sky was overcast, and before long the rain began to fall,

and Horatio had to expend twopence on an omnibus to get back to his lodgings without being wet through. Later on it was necessary to have dinner somewhere, and he went to the Holborn Grill Room. There he discovered Bernard consuming a steak and a pint of bitter with his usual good appetite. They had not met for many months, and were glad to see each other again. Bernard was evidently in good spirits and well pleased with himself.

‘Have you heard of my luck?’ he asked. ‘I have got into the Civil Service. My people wanted me to go to the Bar, but I would not. I should never have made a penny, and if I work I like to get paid for it. A Civil Service examination was just coming on, so they suggested that I should go

in for it and see how I did, and whether it would be worth while cramming for another time. To my own great surprise and everybody else's, I got in, and now I am a clerk at the Board of Explosives. It is rather dull work, but the hours are easy and the holidays good.'

'I know what it is,' said Horatio, laughing : 'if you live to be a thousand, you will get a thousand a year.'

'I don't care about that,' said Bernard ; 'I like a regular life and a comfortable income. I have got some chambers in Gray's Inn. You remember Graham. He is at the Bar. We have a boat together on the river. You had better come up with us one Sunday. But what are you doing? I have not seen you for a long time.'

Horatio did not care to explain his latest occupations, so he said that he was still trying to find something to do.

Bernard held forth on the advantages of Government service, and the benefits of athletic exercise, and the wholesomeness of steaks and bitter.

He did not like London; he was rather bored by town life, and found no pleasure in society functions. He spent most of his spare time playing chess, and reading French novels, and interrupting his friend Graham's arduous study of the law.

A wicked idea occurred to Horatio. It would be great fun to inveigle Bernard into Mr. Newman's gambling den. Bernard was so provokingly steady, and seldom did foolish things. Probably what he would really enjoy would be to

break a lot of lamps, and kick up a row in the street ; but he had not much chance of any more rioting since he left Oxford.

After dinner they went over to Gray's Inn, and inspected Bernard's chambers, which were comfortably though plainly furnished, and had a pleasant lookout into the gardens. They smoked their pipes, and talked over the old times and their old friends.

‘ How would it be to go down to the Nocturnal Club and see if we can find Huntingbox ?’ said Horatio. ‘ It is his new club, and he is very proud of it. I know he would like to see you.’

‘ Of course, he is rather out of my way now,’ said Bernard. ‘ We live in quite different sets, though he has been to see me once or twice.’

The weather had cleared up, and it was fine and cool as they walked westward. Huntingbox was not at his club. Then Horatio saw his opportunity.

‘I think I know where we shall find him,’ he said. ‘He is probably at a certain house close by. It is a gambling place, but you need not play unless you like. Shall we go and see? Perhaps it would amuse you, as I suppose such places are not in your line.’

Bernard thought it would amuse him, and for other reasons he felt inclined to go there. He had known Huntingbox from a small boy. Probably he had fallen into the hands of sharpers from whom he, Bernard, might be able to rescue him. The same preliminaries were gone through at the entrance, and once more Mr. Newman was able to

rejoice over Horatio and another client. He was in a happy frame of mind, for Huntingbox had come there again, and had brought two friends with him. At this rate the house would prosper in grand style, and Mr. Newman congratulated himself on his judicious employment of Horatio.

Huntingbox was losing heavily, and would soon become a suitable client for Messrs. Morrison and Co.

Huntingbox was twenty-three, and his father, Lord Staggerton, was over sixty ; so it was an admirable case for post-obits.

Bernard surveyed the scene with interest ; such places were quite unfamiliar to him. He could not approach Huntingbox, who was surrounded by spectators watching his unusually high

play. He found himself next to a well-dressed foreigner, who entered into conversation with him.

‘You do not play, I see,’ he said in French. ‘It has its advantages; it is nice to make a little money at times.’

‘Thanks,’ said Bernard; ‘I have plenty, and do not want to lose it.’

This remark reached Mr. Newman, who was standing near. He was annoyed. For a young man with plenty of money to come to his house, and not to play, was unendurable. But no doubt the fatal attraction would catch him in time. He tried a mild stimulus. If there is one thing that annoys a young man, it is to be told he is young.

‘Peut-être, monsieur, vous êtes trop jeune,’ said Mr. Newman, joining in the conversation.

‘Non, monsieur, je suis trop âgé,’ replied Bernard rather sharply.

Mr. Newman discreetly retired, it being no part of his system to argue with his clients.

After a time Bernard managed to get near to Huntingbox, who was taking a rest.

‘What! you here?’ said Huntingbox.

Oh, I see; there is Hopkins. I suppose he brought you; but it is the last place where I should have expected to meet you.’

‘We came to find you,’ said Bernard; ‘you were not at the Nocturnal, so Hopkins thought we should run you down here. I hope you find it profitable.’

‘Well,’ said Huntingbox, ‘last night I won, and to-night I have lost; but my

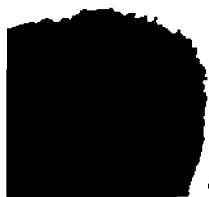
luck seems to be changing, and I shall have a good try to get my own back before I go.'

'I should think you had much better let your own stay where it is,' said Bernard. 'You will only throw good money after bad.'

'You don't understand these things,' said Huntingbox. 'You never did play cards.'

'Don't you remember that night when Graham did the three-card trick in my rooms to show us how it was done?' said Bernard. 'He was not very good at it, but he cleared over a fiver at shilling points. You all would bet on it, though he told you it was a swindle.'

Huntingbox was annoyed. He had been a victim of three-card-trick men and thimble-riggers in his time, and did



not like to be reminded of his misfortunes. He sat down again and continued playing. Bernard looked on for a short time ; then he seized Horatio by the arm and marched him out into the street. He took his arm firmly, and walked quickly towards Gray's Inn.

III.

HORATIO had been accustomed to yield to Bernard's superior strength from their school-days, and he did not resent this summary treatment. He was frightened, for he felt sure that Bernard had guessed the truth. He really liked Bernard, and was afraid of him.

Bernard dragged him into his chambers, shut the door, and put him in an armchair ; then he lit his pipe.

His first impulse was to pitch into Hopkins without mercy. He was not sensitive himself, and he was apt to be quite as brutal at times with his

tongue as he had once been with his fists.

But he had softened down as he grew older. He had learned to pity human weakness. He had got the whip into his hands, but he must use it with discretion if at all. Besides, Horatio looked as if he would cry. So Bernard moderated his violence, and moved his chair close to Horatio, and took his hand.

‘ I am afraid, Hopkins, you have had a very bad time,’ he said gently ; ‘ why did you not come and see me before ?’

Horatio was relieved. He felt a satisfaction in having one friend who was strong and straightforward. He ought to have found out Bernard before ; he would be a much better support than Newman and Abrahams and Hunting-box.

‘I wish I had,’ he answered, ‘but I did not even know you were in London. My Uncle has not turned up again, and I don’t know what I shall do soon to get a living.’

‘Nonsense!’ said Bernard roughly ; ‘you don’t mean to tell me that a clever fellow like you cannot get any work, if you go the right way to find it.’

‘I don’t know about being clever,’ said Horatio. ‘Of course I can do Latin verses and Greek odes, but you can’t get paid for Latin verses.’

Bernard was sorry that he had spoken so sharply ; Horatio looked so weak and distressed.

‘But with your first, and all your other advantages, surely you could get a good job as a schoolmaster,’ said Bernard.

‘ I am afraid not,’ said Horatio. ‘ You see, they think quite as much of cricket and football as they do of learning, and, you know, I don’t much care about church-going and that sort of thing, and I don’t think I could manage small boys ; and, besides, the Dons would never recommend me, as the Oxford tradespeople have been making such a row about their bills.’

All this was quite true. A classical education, even when successful, did not seem to lead to a competence. Probably if Horatio had devoted his talents to modern languages and science, he would have been much better qualified to get an income.

Bernard was sorry for him, he was so clever and so feeble ; and Bernard felt sure that even his last errors were

more due to weakness than to wickedness.

‘The best thing you can do would be to come into the Civil Service,’ he said. ‘That would give you something to live on. But you would have to work and keep regular hours, you know. The public seem to think that we do nothing. I don’t know how they suppose the business of the country is carried on. But that is all a delusion, as I soon found out. There will be an examination before long, and you would be certain to get in.’

‘I am not so sure of that,’ said Horatio.

‘If I can get in,’ said Bernard, ‘of course you can. I was never supposed to be clever, and how I did it is a mystery ; but I managed to work in a

lot of odd things, such as French, and history, and literature, which don't count at Oxford.'

'That is just where it is,' said Horatio. 'I know nothing but Latin and Greek ; I was never allowed to do anything else.'

'You mean you did not take the trouble,' said Bernard ; 'but you can get a lot of marks for classics, and you would be sure to add on a few in other subjects. It is much the best thing you can do. In the meantime you can come and live with me. I have got a third room to which you are welcome, and you will have the place to yourself all day to read in, while I am at work.'

Horatio was really grateful. Here was a chance of getting on his legs once more ; and he would have companionship,

which he had missed in his lodgings. It was good of Bernard to take so much trouble about him. He was beginning to understand the difference between a real friend and a mere companion in amusement.

He gave Bernard a tolerably truthful account of his connection with Newman's establishment, and promised not to go there again. The next day he borrowed enough money from Bernard and Graham to settle up with his landlady, and transferred himself and his few possessions to Gray's Inn. He freshened up his classics, and read some history and law, and went up the river with his friends, and had quite a pleasant life.

In a few weeks the examination came on. There was a vacancy at the Board of Explosives among others, and he

hoped to get that, as he felt that Bernard would help to keep him straight in his new life. He was quite pleased when the news came that he had got it. He had not obtained so high a place as Bernard expected, but it was good enough to give him the choice of two or three appointments. Then a little difficulty arose. There were questions as to character to be answered. His schoolmasters were quite ready to speak well of him, and the Oxford dons were prepared to smooth over his financial disasters ; but he had also to give reliable references as to personal character, which were not easy to find. However, when matters were explained to Huntingbox, he managed to induce his father to give a reference on the strength of having seen Horatio two or three times, and

Lord Staggerton being a well-known politician, his name carried great weight.

So Horatio began his duties in Whitehall. He did not show much business capacity, and wrote a bad hand. It required great patience to get him to draft the official letters in suitable form. He was obliged to arrive in time, as Bernard pulled him out of bed without ceremony if he showed any reluctance to get up.

Sir Marmaduke liked him, as he was always neatly dressed, and had good manners, in spite of having been at Oxford. He showed some skill in the management of difficulties which required tact and judgment, and Sir Marmaduke was always pleased with anybody who did good service. So by degrees Horatio obtained his confidence, and was used by him as his own assistant,

and was gradually initiated into the inner workings of the department.

Then a misfortune happened. Bernard gave up his chambers, and Horatio was left to take care of himself. Some of Bernard's Oxford friends had become clergymen, and were working at their College Mission at Poplar. Bernard had gone to see them, and had become interested in their work; and he made up his mind to go to Poplar and manage a boys' club. He did not offer to take Horatio with him. Such an occupation would not suit Horatio, and he did not think that Horatio's character would be a desirable example to the youth of East London. It was unfortunate for Horatio in many ways. He had practically lived rent free at Gray's Inn, and now he was obliged to go back to

lodgings. Bernard had been a useful check upon him, and, deprived of his influence, Horatio gradually returned to his former companions and his old ways. He got elected to the Nocturnal, and cultivated the society of Huntingbox and his set, and soon began to live altogether beyond his means. But credit is not so easily obtained in London as at Oxford, and he had great difficulty in providing himself with necessary ready money.

Temptation was too much for him. He broke his promise, and introduced new clients to Mr. Newman, and did a little business for Morrison and Co. At the same time he went a great deal into society of a certain kind. He found that various shady people who wished to do business with his office showed a

readiness to cultivate his acquaintance, and made themselves agreeable in many ways. Gradually hints were thrown out that it would be worth his while to use such official influence as he possessed in their favour; little by little he began to receive what were really bribes.

Bernard, of course, had some idea of what was going on, and warned Horatio once or twice; but they did not see much of each other, as their work lay in different directions.

Horatio fell completely into the hands of unscrupulous dealers. He was quite at their mercy, as they could make things very unpleasant for him if they liked. And then, while he was living far beyond his legitimate income, while he was providing himself with funds in

all sorts of dishonest ways, a new influence came into his life.

He had made himself very pleasant to Colonel Bloup, who frequently visited the office. He had taken him to his club for luncheon, and had persuaded him to stay a night in London, and introduced him to Mr. Newman's place of amusement.

The Colonel was not likely to care for gambling, but he had lived a rough life, and even at his age he felt a certain pleasure in what he called 'seeing the world.' Under the guidance of Horatio, he saw a great deal of the world. On such occasions Sergeant Gripper was sent to a music-hall, and instructed to return to Dingymarsh without waiting for his master.

These distractions did not interfere

with the Colonel's scientific work, to which he was as devoted as ever. He tried to persuade Horatio to take an interest in explosives, and invited him to Dingymarsh to see some important experiments. Horatio did not care for the experiments, which caused much noise and bad smells ; but the Colonel had excellent port, and Mrs. Gripper was a very good cook, when she chose to exert herself, and for some reason or other she did choose to exert herself on behalf of Horatio. So he was a frequent visitor at the Tump, and became quite learned in chemistry and physics. The Colonel took a pleasure in teaching him, and he was very clever and quick at understanding things. Sir Marmaduke encouraged these pursuits ; it would be useful to have somebody at

the office who knew a little about the technicalities of the work.

During one of his visits, Horatio accompanied Colonel Bloup to the penny readings, and made the acquaintance of Miss Maria Slaughter, who presided over a stationer's shop for business, and the pianoforte at the entertainment for pleasure.

She was really an attractive girl, and had some refinement. She was the daughter of a cattle-dealer who had been killed in a railway accident, and lived with her mother in a pretty little house which belonged to them. She was badly educated, as was to be expected, and much too eager to secure a husband. She took the worst possible course to such an end by flirting with every man she came across whom she

considered to be at all eligible. She had vague ideas of the ways of the world, and filled her head with silly stories about romantic marriages and sudden fortunes.

Horatio had never been in love. According to his own account, he loved all women ; but when he saw Maria Slaughter he suddenly came to the conclusion that henceforth he could only love one woman. He made all sorts of excuses for going to Dingymarsh, and gave many valuable reasons for visiting the stationer's. He bought quantities of note-paper and envelopes, and numerous and unnecessary pencils and inkstands.

Maria Slaughter very soon saw the real state of the case, and thought she might as well save him any more

expense. She managed, quite accidentally, to meet him by moonlight alone, and in half an hour he had asked her to marry him, and she had accepted him. She took him to see her mother then and there, so that no mistakes might arise in the future. Horatio's explanations were considered quite satisfactory, and both mother and daughter were well pleased with so excellent a capture.

When the news got about, Colonel Bloup was horrified. He objected to women in general, and to Maria Slaughter in particular, and Horatio ought to have made a good marriage. He was young and good-looking, and he might have married a rich wife, which would have set him up comfortably in life.

Sir Marmaduke was disgusted. He

did think better of Hopkins. Now he would be poverty-stricken, and live in a cheap suburb, and sacrifice all his social position. But Horatio had made himself so essential to Sir Marmaduke's comfort that he could not for the present discard his assistance, much as he disapproved of this imprudence.

Very soon Horatio was married, and had to endure some queer company at his wedding breakfast. He made up his mind to live at a good distance from Dingymarsh, and rented a small house near Barnes Common, which he furnished on the hire system. He scraped together all the ready money he could raise, and took his wife for a trip to Paris.

She was greatly improved by marriage. She had quickly discovered her hus-

band's weak points, which were not such as to make him difficult to manage. She was a good girl at heart, and resolved to do her duty, and to take care of Horatio to the best of her ability.

She was happy enough at Barnes. Horatio was well dressed, and had a first-class season ticket; so the neighbours called on his wife, and she made a little circle of friends. She was clever enough to hold her tongue when desirable, and the standard of Barnes society is not unduly severe. Before long she had established her Wednesday afternoons as a regular institution, and Horatio was expected to come home as early as possible on those days, and to drink tea, and make himself agreeable.

When Sir Marmaduke discovered

that Horatio continued to dress well, and showed no external signs of poverty, and that he lived in so desirable a place as Barnes, he was more reconciled to the marriage. He had missed Hopkins sadly during his absence on his honeymoon. Hopkins understood him directly, and did not require long and tedious instructions. Hopkins interviewed troublesome visitors, and relieved him of much disagreeable business. He had tried to make use of a new clerk, Plantagenet Finch Forestier, who had been pitchforked into the office. He would have had no chance in an open competition, so when his uncle, Lord Staggerton, was in the Government, he became his private secretary for a few weeks, and on the strength of this he was smuggled into the Explosives Department without

examination as a person specially qualified for the work, in spite of the protests of Sir Marmaduke, who objected strongly to the appointment.

Plantagenet was a thorn in Sir Marmaduke's side. He gave himself superior airs, and got disliked by the other clerks. He arrived late, and was frequently absent on various excuses. He was much too great to ask anybody to assist him or to explain things, and made numerous blunders and mistakes. Sir Marmaduke tried to take him in hand, but totally failed to make anything of him, and began to consider how he could manage to transfer the encumbrance to some other department. So when Horatio returned, he soon found himself restored to his old position of favour.

He was involved in money difficulties of a more serious kind than ever. His housekeeping swallowed up his salary. His wife was economical, and a good manager, and took care to give him full value for his money ; but there were rent and taxes to be paid, and servants' wages, and instalments on the furniture. Horatio did not take his wife into his confidence ; he did not see any use in troubling her ; he was unselfish to that extent. He adopted a light and careless air, and led her to suppose that the scarcity of money was only due to his forgetfulness to bring it home with him.

He was not now in a good position to do business with Messrs. Newman and Abrahams. He did not mix with people who were likely to require their services. It became necessary to find

a new source of income, and a new source offered itself just when Horatio could least afford to reject it.

The stranger who had introduced him to Mr. Newman's establishment reappeared, and called upon him at the office. Horatio occupied a room with Plantagenet Finch Forestier. Plantagenet was so unpopular that it was difficult to know where to put him, without causing a disturbance between him and his colleagues. Horatio's duties did not involve much sitting still, and as he was always willing to suit himself to the official convenience, he found Plantagenet quartered upon him. His presence was not a serious inconvenience to Horatio who paid no attention to his ways, and very soon showed that he would not stand any nonsense ; but of

course it was impossible to carry on a confidential conversation under the circumstances. Horatio was anxious to obtain news of his Uncle, and possibly the stranger might bring some tidings; so after the ordinary greetings they adjourned to the smoking-room of the Nocturnal, where they could talk without being overheard.

‘I have been out of England for a long while,’ said the stranger. ‘By the way, I left you without much ceremony after our last meeting. I explained to Newman who you were, and I hope you have found him useful. I forgot to tell you my name, though that is not of much consequence, as I have several names. At present I am Alfred Weston, and am staying at the Cosmopolitan Hotel.’

It was evident that Weston had obtained information as to Horatio's doings, and felt able to treat him in a more familiar manner than on the former occasion.

'Have you heard anything of my Uncle?' said Horatio.

'Yes,' said Weston; 'I have seen him, and he asked about you.'

'Why has he not written to me?' said Horatio.

'I regret to say,' said Weston, 'that he is not at present in a position to carry on a correspondence. He is not altogether his own master. The subject is a painful one, and I hope it is not necessary for me to enter into it any further.'

Horatio drew his own conclusions, and asked whether it was not possible

for him to be of use to his Uncle in any way.

‘ I am afraid not,’ said Weston. ‘ We must let matters take their course. Your Uncle is a very clever man, but he has unfortunately made a serious mistake, as we are all apt to do at times.’

‘ Very well,’ said Horatio ; ‘ as you do not wish to tell me any more, I will not ask questions.’

‘ I understand from Newman,’ said Weston, ‘ that you have married a wife and settled down into family life. I gather that your salary is not very high. May I ask how you manage to make both ends meet ? that is, if you do not consider that I am intruding into your private affairs. You may be assured that my only desire is to be of service to you. Your Uncle and I are old

friends, and I should be glad to do you a good turn if I could.'

Horatio did not feel disposed to explain some of his sources of income, but there could be no harm in telling Weston what he certainly knew already.

'I get a little commission from Newman and Abrahams,' he said; 'and I have to go along the best way I can.'

'I will not be indiscreet,' said Weston; 'but I suppose that there may be other ways of making money in official life besides drawing a salary. I do not want you to compromise yourself. Do not be afraid. What I am saying is all in the way of business.'

Horatio did not like the look of things. He did not at all desire to be at the mercy of such persons as Weston

and his allies, and he had no great amount of confidence in their professions of friendship. Weston smoked his cigar in silence for a while, and then continued his remarks :

‘ You have shown us in several ways that you are free from many conventional prejudices,’ he said, ‘ as was to be expected in the nephew of your Uncle. Old-fashioned ideas are out of place in our time. We must all live, and unless we are born with the proverbial silver spoon, we have to help ourselves where we can. I do not know whether you are what is called patriotic. Patriotism is a stupid sentiment according to my ideas. What does it matter where we live, so long as we have a good time ? For myself, I divide my time among several so-called nations. I know many

languages, and though I believe I was born in London, I do not consider myself to belong more to England than to any other country. One can understand a man whose property or position depends upon a certain state of government being eager to support it ; otherwise it really cannot matter under what government we live. I am a citizen of the world, and I despise their politics and their disputes and their stupid desire to overreach each other.'

Horatio had heard similar doctrines from advanced young men at Oxford, but he did not perceive that they had much to do with practical life.

'You see,' continued Weston, 'that we all have to live upon each other. The capitalist lives upon the workman, the landlord lives upon the labourer, the

clever man lives upon the stupid, just as the big fish lives upon the little fish ; it is the order of Nature. People like Newman and Abrahams live on the follies of silly young men. They are sure to do something foolish with their money, so Newman and Abrahams may as well have it as anybody else. Look at rich women, for instance. They build churches and support fat parsons ; they found charitable institutions for the benefit of secretaries and matrons. I am not saying that the poor do not get something. Of course they do ; but the managers take care to make a good thing out of it. When people have more money than they really want, they must dispose of it somehow, and we may as well get our share—as big a share as possible.'

Weston allowed Horatio a few minutes to digest this additional dose.

‘As individuals have their weaknesses and follies,’ he continued, ‘so have nations. They are eager to get the better of each other. They keep up armies and navies, and build fortresses, and spend millions on ironclads. I believe that military and naval officers in most countries have an agreeable life, otherwise all this expenditure is so much waste. If they paid all the people employed without requiring them to do any work, it would be a positive advantage, for they would be less able to go to war, and destroy a quantity of men and materials, and require a new supply. War is the height of folly ; it is a survival of primitive imbecility. Do we go to war in private life ? Of course

not. If we did, we should be fined for assault. We do not even go to law if we are wise. We study people's characters, and learn to make them go the way we desire without any appearance of compulsion. Depend upon it, intellect is the one force of the future.'

'I suppose you mean,' said Horatio, 'that diplomacy will make wars unnecessary.'

'Diplomacy is humbug,' said Weston, 'the greatest of all humbugs, except, perhaps, religion. What I wish to point out is the folly of being taken in by any of these bygone sentimentalities.'

'All this is very original and interesting,' said Horatio, 'but I do not quite see what you are driving at.'

'Yet it is simple enough,' said Weston. 'Newman and Abrahams, and you to a

small extent, make money out of the follies of individuals. It is usually a profitable occupation. But it is a much more profitable occupation to make money out of the follies of nations. Nations are richer and more able to afford extravagances.'

'I dare say that may be true,' said Horatio inquiringly.

'And as they spend millions on their armies and navies,' said Weston, 'so they are willing to pay for any kind of assistance which will enable them to get the better of each other—information, for instance.'

Horatio opened his ears. He began to see the drift of Weston's conversation.

'I think we understand each other,' said Weston; 'but in case you have

not quite followed me, I will put it plainly. I am prepared to buy and pay liberally for a certain commodity which I believe you have it in your power to sell.'

Horatio was silent. His laxity was great, but this was very dangerous ground. Perhaps, however, he might be able to make a profit without doing much real harm.

'What sort of information do you want?' he asked.

'Any information likely to be useful for military purposes,' said Weston. 'I leave it to you to judge what would be acceptable. You can make an offer when you think you have anything suitable to supply.'

'And how am I to know that you will not betray me?' said Horatio.

‘Think for a moment,’ said Weston. ‘What use would it be to us? We should convict ourselves and shut up further supplies. You are quite safe with me. I may as well tell you at once that this kind of business runs to high prices, to hundreds, even to thousands. To begin with, I am much interested in the investigations of your friend Colonel Bloup. Any information about them would be acceptable.’

‘I could probably manage to introduce you to him, if you wish it,’ said Horatio.

‘On no account,’ said Weston. ‘I must not appear at all, and we must not meet again, if we can help it, in such a way as to attract attention. When you wish to see me, you can telegraph to the addresses I shall send you from time

to time, and I will arrange a meeting. If your wife is not inquisitive as to your letters, I will write to your private address. I suppose there is always a liability of letters addressed to your office being opened.'

'They might be, if I happened to be away,' said Horatio. 'My wife does not trouble about my correspondence; but, of course, you will take care not to write anything dangerous.'

'Certainly,' said Weston, 'and you must do the same. The less said and the less written, the better. You will have to trust to us as to terms, as we cannot discuss them. I do not think you will complain of our treatment, and if you are not satisfied, you need not assist us any more.'

Horatio walked with Weston to the

Cosmopolitan Hotel, and went on over Hungerford Bridge to Waterloo to catch a train to Barnes.

He began to consider whether it might not be possible to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. How did Weston intend to make sure that any information he might give would be correct? Was it not possible for Weston himself to fall into the pit which he was so ready to prepare for others? His eloquence had been thrown away upon Horatio, who did not require any corruption, and who was not likely to allow any scruples to stand in the way of his own advantage; and Horatio had sense enough to see through the sophistries of his arguments. He did not for a moment believe that Weston was so wise, and everybody else so

foolish as the conversation seemed to presume.

He wondered what sort of information, true or false, it would be best to offer. He did not know very much, for, owing to his constant attendance on Sir Marmaduke, he had little to do with the details of the official work.

Colonel Bloup and his experiments had been suggested. He did know something about them. The Colonel had shown him much that was interesting during his visits to Dingymarsh. He knew that the Colonel was trying to make a new explosive—much more powerful than anything as yet discovered—and a sort of subterranean torpedo.

The Colonel was annoyed at Horatio's marriage, and had almost dropped his

acquaintance. Horatio resented this, and did not feel very amiably disposed towards the Colonel.

He received a letter from Weston containing a cipher to be used in their correspondence, and advising him to write in Latin. This would be understood by chemists and others, and would make the cipher additionally hard to unravel, in case his reports should fall into wrong hands.

Horatio began with the subterranean torpedo. It did not seem to him to be an invention of much value. It refused to take the course intended by the Colonel, and was addicted to going off in unexpected places ; but the Dingy-marsh experiments were on a very small scale. Nevertheless he received a handsome reward for his description, which

ended his pecuniary difficulties for the present.

Time had gone on, and his wife had presented him with a daughter. Then he developed a new phase of character; he was entirely devoted to the baby. He spent hours nursing her. He was seen wheeling her in a perambulator on Barnes Common, to the astonishment of his neighbours. His wife became almost jealous. This exhibition of domestic virtue occupied him and kept him out of mischief. As the child began to walk and talk, his delight was unbounded. He had to put up with much good-natured chaff from his colleagues, to whom he expounded her wonderful powers.

He obtained some sympathy from Mr. Peasancues, who had not hitherto

regarded him with favour. The principal clerk was a family man of eminence. He had been the father of ten children, of whom he was immensely proud.

But Horatio considered his own infant to be quite equal to any number of other infants who had ever existed.

IV.

IN the course of conversation with Sir Marmaduke, Horatio managed to keep himself well informed as to what progress was being made with the new explosive. A secret of such importance might provide him with a small fortune.

He was becoming tired of official life. He would be glad to give it up if he had a chance. He would like to go and live at some pleasant place abroad with sunshine and flowers. He was surrounded by dangers. At any time his irregularities might be shown up, and then he would be done for. His ordinary duties

were pleasant enough. He had to interview many people and carry on various negotiations. He was freed from the more irksome part of the work. His numerous visitors were not approved of by Plantagenet, who hid himself behind a barricade of screens.

Plantagenet had not the least idea of being civil to people whom he did not happen to like. He could be very rude if he wished, and Horatio was obliged to impress upon him that in official life, and probably in all states of life, bad manners are a mistake. But Plantagenet was becoming impossible. Sir Marmaduke, with the cordial assistance of Mr. Peasancues, was scheming for his removal.

Her Majesty's coaling-station at Bow-Wow-Wow on the west coast of Africa,

was in need of a Comptroller of Cinders. This appointment was frequently vacant, as its occupants usually succumbed to the climate after a brief residence. If Plantagenet could be induced to go there, Sir Marmaduke would get rid of him.

It was a little difficult to secure the berth, as there were numerous other candidates, persons whom for various reasons it was desired to send as far away as possible. Sir Marmaduke managed to persuade Plantagenet to use his own family influence. He explained to him how much more dignified his position would be than if he continued a clerk at the Board of Explosives. After a few years' absence he might make it a stepping-stone to a better place, or retire on a pension. Sir Marmaduke

talked about C.B. and K.C.B., and K.C.M.G., and so forth, and Plantagenet fell into the trap, to the delight of his colleagues.

On a hot summer morning Horatio sat at his table examining a mass of papers. He had taken off his coat and was working in his shirt-sleeves. The window was wide open, and the room was cool and fresh. He was really interested in what he was doing. As he sat there he had all the outside appearance of a model official. The door opened, and Bernard came in.

‘I see you are hard at it,’ he said; ‘I shall not interrupt you for long. There are a few things about which I want you to enlighten me.’

‘There is nothing very urgent in what I am doing,’ said Horatio; ‘I like

to work quick and go through with things. How are you getting on at Poplar ?'

Horatio was annoyed because Bernard had never asked him to go there. Bernard had persuaded several of the other clerks to come and see him, and they had helped him in various ways with his boys' club. Not that Horatio at all wanted to visit Poplar, but he thought that Bernard might have asked him. He guessed the reason why Bernard had not done so, and he was displeased that he should be considered an undesirable companion for a lot of roughs.

'I am all right, thanks,' said Bernard; 'it is not a bad place in summer. The houses are low, and the docks give plenty of open space, so there is gener-

ally a breeze, and it is cooler than the West End. In the winter there are rivers of mud whenever it rains, and it is awfully damp.'

'I cannot think how you can stand it,' said Horatio.

Bernard penetrated through the screens and greeted Plantagenet.

'I hear you are going to Bow-Wow - Wow,' he said—'rather a hot place.'

'I believe it is hot,' said Plantagenet, 'but heat suits me. It is better than living in a slum.'

'You must not think that Poplar is a slum,' said Bernard, 'though we should hardly live there by choice. Somebody must look after the poor, I suppose.'

'It would be much better to leave

them alone,' said Plantagenet. 'You only make them discontented, and encourage them in Socialism.'

'Nobody could say that I am Socialistic,' said Bernard.

'Perhaps not,' said Plantagenet. 'You destroy home life by clubs, and do things for people which they ought to do for themselves.'

'Nonsense!' said Bernard. 'What are the boys to do in the winter evenings with only a small kitchen for a whole family to sit in? They get wet outside in the streets until they are old enough to get wet inside in the public-house. We ought to do as much as possible for other people, not as little.'

'You are only wasting your time and doing mischief,' said Plantagenet. 'You

pauperize the people. The Charity Organization Society has made that clear enough.'

'The Charity Organization Society is of the devil,' said Bernard. 'Christianity commands us to help people because they are in need, not because they are deserving. The world seems to think that we ought not to accept help if it can be avoided ; it ignores the whole beauty of giving and receiving. If you really love a person, it is a joy to do anything for him, and a joy to receive anything from him. And we ought all to love one another. We try to make the boys happy when they are at leisure, to help them to enjoy some of the games and amusements which we enjoyed when we were young.'

'I do not believe they grow up any



better or more fit for their work,' said Plantagenet.

'That is not the point,' said Bernard :
'we want to make them happier. There is more real happiness to be got out of football than out of pitch-and-toss.'

Horatio listened in silence. He did not think that he had ever tried to make anybody happy, except his little daughter. He really did love his child. He knew that he was happiest when playing with her or nursing her. He would do anything to make her happy. Did Bernard really love the boys in the same sort of way? How could anybody love a lot of dirty, rough, troublesome boys? Horatio thought they must be dirty and rough and troublesome.

'I believe,' said Plantagenet, 'that you enjoy having a sort of superiority

over the people with whom you live. You think you are denying yourself, but it is a form of selfishness.'

'What you say is true in a certain sense,' said Bernard. 'There is a danger in the position. We have to give up many things which are generally thought to be desirable; but if we receive a hundredfold in this life, it is only what we are taught to expect. We certainly do receive a hundredfold.'

There was a knock at the door, and a messenger came in. Sir Marmaduke wished to see Mr. Hopkins.

Bernard detained Horatio for a few minutes while they discussed some official matters; then he returned to his own room, and Horatio went off to the Chief.

Sir Marmaduke was not in a good

temper. He had very unwisely accepted an invitation to dinner in Queen's Gate on the previous evening. He ought to have known better. He was under no obligation to allow himself to be poisoned on this occasion.

Sometimes it is a disagreeable necessity to eat bad dinners, and swallow abominable liquids, and listen to stupid conversation ; but he might easily have declined this invitation. His host was a criminal of the worst kind in Sir Marmaduke's eyes. He had invited twenty miscellaneous people to dinner. His establishment had not been equal to the strain upon its resources, and he had brought in extraneous aid of the usual unsatisfactory kind. He had entertained his guests with badly cooked dishes and meretricious wines.

In a weak moment Sir Marmaduke had gone there. He had learned a lesson. He would never again dine further west than Eaton Place. And if the state of his digestion was not a sufficient cause of irritation, he had mixed up all his keys in hopeless confusion. He usually kept them tied together with a piece of red tape, and had some empirical way of recognising the right key when he wanted to open anything, but the tape had broken, and the keys were all loose.

Horatio was expected to fit them into their proper locks, an operation of some delicacy. However, he set to work on drawers and cupboards and despatch-boxes. He gently suggested that it might be as well to label the keys, an idea which did not seem to have occurred

to his Chief. By degrees the various receptacles were opened, and Sir Marmaduke was able to get to work.

In the course of his investigations Horatio came across the Colonel's sample bottle. He recognised it at once, for he had seen similar small square bottles at Dingymarsh. He had no doubt about its contents. His opportunity had come. He knew that the Colonel had been at the office a few days ago. Horatio did not hesitate for a moment. He put the bottle into his pocket.

It was some time before he could escape from Sir Marmaduke, but at last Mr. Peasancues came in, and engaged his attention with the arrangements for disposing of Plantagenet.

Horatio then went out, ostensibly for

luncheon. By a great stroke of luck Weston was in London, and Horatio found him having a very late breakfast at the Cosmopolitan Hotel. He explained that he had something of the highest importance to communicate, and they retired to Weston's room.

When they were alone, Horatio produced the bottle.

‘This is a sample of the Colonel's invention,’ he said. ‘I suppose you will be ready to go to a high figure for it.’

‘You need not doubt that,’ said Weston, ‘after the stiff price we paid for the torpedo, which is quite useless.’

‘You see,’ said Horatio, ‘the bottle will certainly be missed very soon, and it is quite possible that I may have to run. In that case my income will be gone, so it is a very great risk. I

should like to be quite sure that the game is worth the candle. I could easily replace the bottle this afternoon.'

'Unfortunately, I have not much money with me,' said Weston; 'but, if you will give me the bottle, I will start at once for the Continent. I can assure you that you will be liberally treated, and you must be content with my assurance for two or three days.'

'Do you think the amount will be enough to enable me to go abroad and take up something new?' said Horatio.

'Would three thousand pounds satisfy you?' said Weston. 'You could start fruit-growing in California, if you feel so disposed, or ostrich-farming in South Africa, or a lot of other things.'

Horatio thought it would do, and

Weston promised to send him that amount in a few days.

Horatio left the bottle, and returned to the office.

He felt very uneasy. It was impossible to say when the loss would be discovered, or what might happen when it was discovered. He knew very well that he had brought himself within reach of the criminal law. He almost thought that it would be wise to get across the Channel without delay, but he had hardly any available money. He was obliged to wait until Weston sent him some funds. As he had to remain in England, it would be better to go to the office than to stay at home; he would know what was going on, and his absence might cause suspicion at the critical moment. So he went up as

usual on the next two days. Then came a Sunday. Probably on the Monday he would hear from Weston. He arranged to take a holiday on that day.

His wife noticed that he seemed fidgety and not quite himself, but he complained of the heat, and said that he wanted a holiday. He suggested that they might go abroad for a few weeks before long. He wondered how his wife would take it if his proceedings were made public. His friends had so often treated his offences as pardonable weaknesses. He knew that in the present case they would certainly be severe. He began to realize that his name would be a by-word; but he doubted whether, even in case of discovery, there would be any publicity.

Official scandals are generally hushed up, if possible. At the worst he would only lose his berth, and if Weston kept his promise he could afford that.

The morning post brought him no letters. He sat out in his little garden, and looked over some newspapers. He spread some rugs, on which the baby could crawl about, and amused himself by playing with her.

About luncheon-time Sir Marmaduke's telegram arrived. Horatio was thoroughly alarmed. His wife noticed his agitation, and asked if anything was wrong.

Horatio tried to control himself, and explained that there was a trouble about some stores, and that he might have to be absent for a few days.

He had no intention of going to the

office ; his great desire was to get away as soon, and as far, as possible.

But he must raise some money before he could travel, and he did not quite see how this was to be done. The only person he could think of who might possibly lend him any was Bernard. He did not think it likely that Bernard would be told about the lost bottle. Probably Sir Marmaduke would keep the matter as secret as possible. He could go down to Poplar in the evening, and see what he could get out of Bernard ; then he could go abroad, and his wife could forward Weston's letter when it arrived.

Of course, it was not likely that Bernard would have much ready money at Poplar, but if he would write a cheque no doubt Newman would cash it, and

his establishment was open most of the night. This seemed the best available plan.

He managed to swallow some luncheon. Then he went up to his dressing-room and packed up a few clothes and put on a grey suit.

He took a pleasure in his clothes, and his wardrobe was plentifully stocked. He had favoured many tailors and shirt-makers with his custom, and paid them as little as possible, though he was often able to introduce new customers, which enabled him to extend his own credit.

He sat down and lit a pipe. After all, perhaps life was only a bore. It had been so difficult for him lately. He had to run so many risks and to take so much trouble. Why could he not lie still in the sunshine and enjoy

himself? He did not want much. He was not ambitious. He did not care for worldly success; all he had ever wanted was to be at ease, to be left in peace. If he got safely through this crisis, he would never do anything dangerous again. He would give all his money to his wife, and she should take care of him. He must have somebody to take care of him. But it would not do to stay at Barnes much longer; the office might send somebody to fetch him, or to find out where he was. So he put on his hat, and picked up his bag, and walked through the mid-day heat to the station. He wondered how long it might be before he saw Barnes again. He had quite an affection for the place. His baby had been born there. He had so often taken her out

on the common. But he remembered other places abroad with more sunshine and softer air where they could be quite as happy. It was certainly very hot. The errand-boys basked in the sun as they read their penny dreadfuls ; a few perspiring cyclists were taking their laborious pleasure ; the gardens and shrubberies were burnt up ; where the watering-cart had not yet passed, a cloud of dust was driven along the road.

The station seemed quite cool and fresh. Horatio sat on a bench and smoked a cigar, and waited patiently for his train. At that time in the afternoon there were not many passengers : a few servants taking their evenings out, a suburban music-master travelling from pupil to pupil, a smart lady on her way

to a garden-party, and a little man who looked like a foreign clerk. He wore a black morning coat too tight for him, a brown felt hat, a showy scarf-pin, and several rings. The usual spectacles aided his imperfect vision, through which he appeared to be studying the eccentricities of the English language. Horatio looked out for an empty carriage, and settled himself on the shady side of it, resting his legs on the opposite seat in defiance of the company's particular request.

What should he do when he got to London? It would be no use to go and see Bernard until the evening. He did not feel disposed to pass the afternoon at the Nocturnal. It was impossible to say who might be there. Probably the best place would be the

billiard-room of the Cosmopolitan Hotel, where he sometimes played, but where his official friends would be unlikely to go. It was only just across the river from Waterloo ; he could sleep at the hotel if necessary, and it would be handy for Charing Cross in the morning. He left his bag with the hall-porter and descended to the billiard-room in the basement. He selected a comfortable armchair, and ordered some gin and ginger-beer with a big lump of ice, and settled himself down to look through the evening paper. Some Americans were playing billiards very badly, and a few groups of domino gamblers were scattered about the room. The paternal British legislature forbids us to play at cards on licensed premises, lest we should get into mischief, but

allows us to gamble with dominoes as much as we like in every café and smoking-room in London, until domino sharpening has become a regular trade. Horatio recognised some of the fraternity who frequented the Cosmopolitan on the lookout for strangers wishing to lose their money.

The foreign clerk who had come up from Barnes also found his way there, and seated himself in a dark corner behind Horatio, where he complacently imbibed lager beer.

Having taken a survey of the room, Horatio turned over the paper. He speedily discovered the account of Professor Kikankuffer's explosion. As he read it, he concluded at once that the Colonel's bottle had caused the mischief. At first he feared that his own payment

might be affected, but of course Weston would have secured the funds before giving up the bottle, so that he was probably safe. He wished that Weston had been quicker with his remittance. He ought to know how urgent it was, and how necessary that Horatio should have enough ready money to make good his escape. He did not know where Weston had gone, or for what Government he was acting, but he thought that five days ought to have been long enough for the business. He had no confidence whatever in Weston except so far as it might be to Weston's own interest to pay him the money. If he should be obliged to leave the Board of Explosives, would he be of any further use to Weston? Why had not this view of the case occurred to him

before? If he had been prudent he would have kept the bottle until Weston had paid for it.

The Americans had finished their game to the evident joy of the marker, who was quite disgusted with them. A billiard-marker must require great self-control and a perfect command of facial expression to watch the performance of a conceited duffer with unmoved countenance.

A rather loudly-dressed man had entered into conversation with the Americans. He was one of the frequenters of the room who picked up a living at billiards or dominoes, or anything else that came in his way. He took on one of the Americans at billiards, and was giving him twenty-five. Horatio knew very well that on

their apparent form he was capable of giving him much more than that. The game, however, was a good one. The American played better than before, and won by ten. He promptly offered to play the Englishman level. Some conversation was carried on as to the stakes. The American again showed improved form, and won rather easily. The Englishman challenged him at a much higher stake. Then a real battle began. The Englishman always held a slight lead up to ninety-two—eighty-six, when the American ran right out. It began to dawn upon Horatio that bad play is as much an art as good, and that the Americans in their first game had been getting themselves into finessing form. The Englishman had been done brown, and Horatio was not

sorry to see it, though his opponent was, no doubt, one of his own kind.

Horatio acted on the principle that, when in difficulties, it is wise to eat and drink well, and he intended to stand himself a good dinner before invading the unknown regions of East London.

The Cosmopolitan possessed an excellent *chef*, and he knew that the *table d'hôte* there could be trusted, which was more than he would say for most *tables d'hôte*. He went into the lavatory, and washed his hands and brushed his hair. Then he tackled his dinner, and conscientiously followed the menu from the *hors d'œuvres* to the dessert.

It was not much past seven, so he retired to the smoking-room for coffee and a cigar. He began to take a cheerful view of things. No doubt

Bernard would accommodate him ; to-morrow morning he would get across the Channel. Then he would give his wife an address, and she could forward Weston's remittance, and he could send for her and the baby. They could afford to spend a year abroad if they liked, before it would be necessary for him to seek some new occupation. It was pleasant to have escaped from Sir Marmaduke, and Mr. Peasancues, and Plantagenet. He could snap his fingers at the dishonest traders, who had so long held him in subjection.

He walked down to the Temple Station, and took the Underground Railway to Bishopsgate. He knew that Bernard usually went to Poplar from Broad Street, so it did not occur to him that Mark Lane and Fenchurch Street would

be the shorter route. The busy crowd at Broad Street jostled him as he made his way to the booking-office. The station was full of workers returning home from their daily toil in the City. There were staid elderly men in high hats and frock-coats of rather a seedy kind ; young City clerks of the cheaper sort in gay apparel ; working men tired and cross, dirty and perspiring ; quantities of boys romping with each other in their joyful escape from the restraint of their offices and workshops ; women of careworn countenance, honest bread-winners of numerous families ; steady girls reading the novels of Edna Lyall and Mrs. Henry Wood ; gay girls laughing and screaming in eager co-operation, to attract the attention of the other sex.

There, too, was the little foreign clerk

who had come up from Barnes, and sat behind Horatio in the Cosmopolitan billiard - room. Horatio happened to push against a working man, who looked like a bricklayer, and was rather the worse for drink. He turned indignantly.

‘I keeps you,’ he said ; ‘I keeps toffy blokes like you, let alone being pushed.’

‘If you think you keep me,’ said Horatio, ‘I should advise you to give it up at once. It is a most useless extravagance. Clearly, I am no good to anybody.’

The crowd appreciated the sarcasm, and the bricklayer was the more indignant. Horatio left him expounding the injustices of society on the station staircase, and went to take his ticket. The Poplar train was at the platform, and Horatio made for the only first-class

smoking carriage. Its four corners were occupied by four small boys smoking cigarettes and reading *Comic Cuts*, *Answers*, and similar periodicals. Horatio had to take a middle seat. The small boys imitated the habits of la-di-da swells to perfection, cocking their little fingers as they held their cigarettes, and addressing each other as 'deaw fellow.'

If Horatio had talked to them and offered them cigarettes, they would probably have amused him throughout the journey ; but he was not accustomed to that style of society. The comedy was brought to a summary conclusion by the appearance of a ticket-collector. The small boys could only produce the return halves of their workmen's tickets, and were promptly ejected.

Just as the train started, the little foreign clerk, who had come up from Barnes, jumped in, and continued his study of English in the corner opposite Horatio. The scenery of Shoreditch and Haggerston, as perceived in the gathering darkness, did not seem attractive ; so Horatio closed his eyes and prepared himself to repose peacefully until his arrival at Poplar. It was the terminus, and the railway officials would be sure to let him know when he got there.

The train made a stop of some minutes at Dalston, waiting for its Chalk Farm connection. The ticket-collector stood outside the first-class carriage, and sent the numerous passengers who could not find room in the third, to the second-class compartments at the rear.

The train had just cleared the short

tunnel after Dalston, when the little foreign clerk suddenly put down his book, leant over to Horatio, and placed his two hands on Horatio's sides.

The movement was so rapid that Horatio had not even time to open his eyes. He sat in his seat quite still, apparently asleep. As the train approached Hackney the foreign clerk withdrew his hands, picked up his book, and at the station left the carriage. He carefully closed the door, and went rapidly through the gallery to the Great Eastern station, where he took a ticket to Bethnal Green.

A train arrived, and he entered an empty second-class carriage and recommenced his study of English. When the train was well on its way, he put aside his book, removed his spectacles,

threw his brown felt hat out of the window, substituted a cloth cap from his pocket, pulled off his incipient whiskers and moustache, and thus effected a complete change of appearance. He left the train at Bethnal Green, and was soon lost in the crowd of the Mile End Road.

Horatio was carried on to Poplar. The guard and porters shouted out 'All change!' and looked into each compartment to see that nobody was left in the train to be carried back to Broad Street. They came to Horatio's compartment, and shouted to him to get out. But Horatio did not move. They were accustomed to City clerks who had business at the Docks, and who had sometimes lunched too well. They concluded that Horatio was sleeping the

sleep of the drunken, and shook him roughly. It was a case of a probable tip.

‘This is Poplar, sir,’ the guard said ;
‘the train goes back to Broad Street.’

But Horatio did not move.

The guard thought it must be a bad case, and with the assistance of a porter lifted out Horatio, and deposited him on a bench. Their united efforts failed to rouse him, so the guard went away with his train, and Horatio was left in charge of the station officials.

A foreman arrived, and directed some porters to take Horatio into a waiting-room. Shakings and water thrown on his face had no effect, so they sent for the police and a doctor. It might be a suicide, or perhaps a murder, but there was no sign of violence of any kind.

A doctor was soon procured. He undid Horatio's clothes and felt his heart. He looked puzzled. A policeman arrived, prepared to take somebody into custody. The doctor put his watch-glass at Horatio's mouth ; no film appeared.

‘ This gentleman is dead,’ he said : ‘ failure of the heart's action. You had better search his pockets and find out who he is.’

The policeman, who did the searching, produced a watch, some keys, a cigarette-case, two pipes, a tobacco-pouch, some matches, a pocket-book, a season ticket from Barnes to Waterloo, and a first-class return ticket from Broad Street to Poplar.

The season ticket contained Horatio's name, but not his address, so the police-

man opened the pocket-book, which contained a few letters and papers, one of which mentioned the Board of Explosives.

‘We have a Mr. Bernard living here,’ he said, ‘who belongs to the Board of Explosives. Probably this gentleman, who appears to be a Mr. Hopkins, was on his way to visit him. We had better send for him, and see if he can recognise the body.’

A porter was despatched to fetch Bernard, who was well known in the neighbourhood, while the others kept watch over Horatio.

‘It is a curious case,’ said the doctor, ‘and I shall be interested to see the result of a post-mortem. Of course, there will be a coroner’s inquest, though it is without doubt a case of sudden

death from heart disease. The peculiar thing is that there are no apparent signs of heart disease.'

The foreman shook his head, and mentioned his wife's uncle, who had died suddenly in the train, but he was a builder and contractor and a very fat man. The policeman was disappointed, for it did not seem likely that anybody could be arrested.

At length Bernard arrived, and requested that Horatio might be removed to his house and placed in his charge. The doctor explained that a coroner's inquest would be necessary, and that, as the coroner would be sitting in the morning, probably the inquest could be held then, and afterwards the body could be removed to Barnes, if desired.

On consideration, Bernard thought



that no good purpose would be served by communicating with Mrs. Hopkins until the morning. He would send a boy with a letter by the earliest trains, so as to arrive before any newspapers could reach her.

An ambulance was brought, and Horatio was taken to Harris Street, where Bernard lived in a small house next his club. The body was laid on a sofa in Bernard's dining-room, which was turned into a *chapelle ardente* for the occasion. A number of candles were lighted, the room was sprinkled with holy water and censed, a crucifix was placed on Horatio's breast, and images of Mary and Joseph on each side of him. The Rev. Sebastian Ambrose Piggott, the curate, said the *Dirige*, the *Miserere*, and the *De*

Profundis. He wished to know whether Horatio had been a communicant. Bernard replied that he knew nothing about that, but Horatio was his friend, and was dead. Mr. Piggott suggested that it was doubtful if he had cared much for Mary and Joseph in his lifetime, but Bernard replied that no doubt they cared for him, as for all sinners.

V.

BERNARD had written a letter to Mrs. Hopkins, explaining about Horatio's death as well as he could, and asking her to come over to Poplar, or to send him her wishes. He had arranged with a boy out of work to start by the first train in the morning to Barnes.

He had also posted a letter to the office. He could not go to work, as he would be wanted at the inquest, besides being obliged to make arrangements about the funeral, for Mrs. Hopkins would need his assistance. He did not know that Horatio had any other

friends who would be useful in this emergency.

Early in the morning a telegram arrived. Bernard supposed it must be from Mrs. Hopkins, but it turned out to be from Colonel Bloup :

‘ Shall be with you in an hour. Suppose I can get your address at police-station.’

Bernard wondered what could bring the Colonel upon the scene. He knew that the Colonel had taken up Horatio at one time, but lately a coolness had arisen. Probably he had seen the account of Horatio’s death in the newspapers, which contained a few lines about it. But Bernard did not quite see why the Colonel should think it necessary to come to Poplar in such

haste. However, it was a good thing that Horatio's few friends should show their sympathy ; possibly the Colonel might be of some use to Mrs. Hopkins. He was supposed to be well off, and must have made money by his inventions and discoveries, and he did not appear to have any relations or family.

Bernard wondered whether Horatio had insured his life. Probably he had not ; he had never been prudent or thoughtful. He had lived like the birds from day to day, and had never seemed to trouble about the future.

A message arrived that the coroner would sit at twelve ; the jury would come to Harris Street to view the body.

There was a knock at the door. Mrs. Hopkins had arrived. She was very pale, and looked straight in front of her

without seeing anything. Evidently the shock had completely upset her. She said nothing. She walked in, turned instinctively round the corner, knelt down beside Horatio's body, and hid her face in her hands. She was accompanied by the boy whom Bernard had sent to Barnes, and a middle-aged man who stood still in the passage and let Mrs. Hopkins settle herself down. Bernard suggested that he should come upstairs into his sitting-room. It would be best to leave Mrs. Hopkins alone in her grief. When they were seated the stranger announced himself.

‘I am Horatio's Uncle,’ he said. ‘I have only just arrived in England. This is a bad business. None of our family have suffered from heart disease.’

Bernard surveyed him with interest,

and wondered what he could be. He was certainly not a gentleman. His eyes were keen, and his manners showed that he was accustomed to deal with strangers. He was sharp and penetrating, and seemed to take in everything at a glance, and to see through everybody.

‘Probably you have heard of me,’ he said—‘nothing good I dare say ; I have had a queer life, but I have retired from business at last. It is sad to come back and find the boy dead. However, I can look after his wife and child.’

Bernard was relieved to know that Mrs. Hopkins would have somebody to take care of her. He ventured to point out the difficult position in which Horatio had been placed by his Uncle’s disappearance.

‘It was unavoidable,’ said the Uncle. ‘I could not help it. I will explain it later on.’

There was a loud hammering at the door. Bernard’s housekeeper announced Colonel Bloup, who was accompanied by Sergeant and Mrs. Gripper.

The Colonel was dressed in his high hat and frock-coat, and had assumed an air of great importance. The Sergeant carried a large and apparently heavy bag; Mrs. Gripper, in her everlasting bonnet, was in the rear.

Bernard introduced the Colonel to Horatio’s uncle, but they were old acquaintances.

‘Gracious me, Hopkins!’ said the Colonel; ‘I had no idea you were in England. Your nephew is a foolish young man, and has got into a nice

mess. I saw a few lines in the paper this morning, and put two and two together. If I had not arrived, he ran a good chance of being buried alive. I am pretty sure as to what has been done to him, and we will soon find out whether I am right. Where is he ?'

Bernard explained that Horatio was dead, and that his body was in the room below.

'I do not believe he is any more dead than I am,' said the Colonel. 'Take me to him.'

Bernard led the way downstairs. He knew that the Colonel was eccentric, but thought that this was going too far, and did not like to disturb Mrs. Hopkins. She was sitting in the kitchen. Bernard's housekeeper had made beef-tea, and was trying to persuade her to take some

nourishment. She seemed almost inanimate, and was ready to let people do what they liked with her.

‘My dear madam,’ said the Colonel, ‘you must not give way like this. I believe a stupid mistake has been made. I do not think that your husband is dead at all.’

Mrs. Hopkins only stared vacantly at the Colonel, and allowed the housekeeper to feed her with beef-tea.

The Colonel penetrated into Bernard’s dining-room, where Horatio was lying. He seemed impressed by the scene.

‘I must ask you to blow out some of the candles,’ he said, ‘and to remove the figures of the shepherd and shepherdess, before I can get to work. They are picturesque, no doubt, though I



should never have associated our friend with pastoral pursuits.'

Bernard looked somewhat shocked, and explained that the images were Mary and Joseph.

'Indeed!' said the Colonel. 'I have often seen similar figures, but never knew their names before. It is highly interesting, but we must have space; therefore I must request you to remove them.'

Sergeant Gripper opened the bag, and extracted a small box and two pieces of glass. He and Mrs. Gripper stood on the glass, and were connected by wires with Horatio's body.

The Colonel attached a sort of key to the wire. Immediately the Sergeant and Mrs. Gripper jumped off the glass in a very unceremonious manner.

The Colonel was much pleased.

‘As I supposed,’ he said ; ‘our friend is no more dead than I am. We will perform a little operation, and he will be as well as ever.’

The spectators stood round in expectation. Mrs. Hopkins had partially recovered, and looked through the doorway.

The Colonel attached the wires to the box and again applied the key. At the same time he kept his hand on Horatio’s pulse.

‘My friends,’ he said, ‘in a few minutes Horatio will come to himself. I must ask you to make no allusion to what has happened ; the shock might be dangerous. You had better all withdraw, except Mr. Bernard. We will tell him that he was taken seriously ill/

in the train, or something of that sort. It would never do to let him know that he was given up for dead.'

The Colonel and Bernard were left alone with Horatio. By degrees a slight colour returned to Horatio's cheeks. His limbs began to twitch. He stretched himself and opened his eyes. The Colonel rapidly put the wires and the box out of sight.

Horatio looked about him in a dazed kind of way. His eyes settled upon Bernard, and he stared at him for a few minutes. Then his memory returned, and he sat up.

'I was coming to see you, Bernard,' he said; 'but I don't know how I got here. I must have been asleep.'

'You were taken ill in the train,' said Bernard, 'and the railway people

brought you here. Do you feel better now ?'

'I am rather giddy,' said Horatio, 'and feel shaky. Why, there is the Colonel.'

'Yes, I am here,' said the Colonel. 'You must drink this ; it will pull you together.'

The Colonel produced a small bottle and a glass out of his bag, and gave Horatio a dose.

'Your friends have been unnecessarily alarmed,' he continued. 'Your wife is here, and your long-lost Uncle has turned up. By the way, Mr. Bernard, some of that beef-tea I saw in your kitchen would help to strengthen the invalid.'

Bernard went to fetch the beef-tea, and, having cautioned Mrs. Hopkins to



avoid excitement, brought her to her husband, the Uncle following them. Horatio sat up and drank beef-tea, surrounded by his friends. A group of men appeared in the street, accompanied by a policeman—the coroner's jury, who had come to view the body.

It was a difficult situation. Bernard sent Horatio and his friends upstairs, and interviewed the policeman and the foreman of the jury. He explained that the body had come to life.

The policeman was not at all satisfied, and the foreman of the jury looked suspicious. There was nothing for it but to send for the doctor who had seen Horatio on the previous evening.

In the meantime, the policeman posted himself at the door to keep guard over the dangerous characters within.

The doctor was extremely indignant that anybody whom he had pronounced dead should have the audacity to be alive. He was duly cautioned by the Colonel, and then Horatio was produced for his inspection.

He was obliged to admit that Horatio was perfectly alive. He had some conversation with the Colonel, who explained what had happened in very long words, and promised to keep quiet as to the doctor's mistake. The policeman came to the conclusion that Mr. Hopkins must have been very drunk indeed. So at length they were persuaded to go away.

Horatio's Uncle suggested some luncheon, during which they could talk over all that had happened.

Sergeant and Mrs. Gripper were de-

spatched to Woolwich to visit some military friends, and the others made their way to the station and took the train to Broad Street.

They drove to the Cosmopolitan, where Horatio's Uncle ordered luncheon to be prepared in a private room. He had not said much on the journey, and was reserving his explanations until the whole party had fortified themselves with a meal.

The Colonel's antipathy to Mrs. Hopkins seemed to have disappeared, and he talked away to her about science and explosives. She did not understand a word of his conversation, but it helped her to recover from the shock she had undergone.

The Cosmopolitan provided a very good luncheon, in the course of which

the whole party regained their spirits. Horatio gradually recollected his doings on the previous evening, and his preparations for flight. He was still anxious to get away, but now that his Uncle had returned, he felt safer under his protection.

Mrs. Hopkins had no objection to tobacco, so the four men lit their cigars, and Horatio's Uncle began his explanations.

‘My unfortunate and unavoidable disappearance,’ he said, ‘has caused much trouble and inconvenience. It was not my fault. It was absolutely necessary for me to seek a place of safety, and the only safe place was a prison.’

The Colonel smiled blandly, as if he were quite accustomed to lunching with persons who had recently come out of

gaol. Horatio was annoyed. He thought that his Uncle need not have been so communicative about his private affairs in the presence of the others.

‘I was caught in an attempt to steal a case of jewellery belonging to a commercial traveller,’ continued the Uncle. ‘We were on a journey in the same railway carriage, and he had got out to have some food. Foreign Governments are summary in their criminal procedure, so I was promptly convicted and shut up for three years.’

He looked quite pleased with himself, and certainly he did not seem to have suffered from his confinement.

Horatio was more and more annoyed, to the evident amusement of his Uncle.

‘Before I go on, I must hand over these two packets to you,’ he said to Horatio.

‘You will see that they contain three thousand pounds—two thousand in one packet, and one thousand in the other. I had to extract the two thousand from Weston, and the other thousand from a young scoundrel called Leben, whom Weston had engaged to murder you for that price. I cannot congratulate you on your acquaintances. Weston is an unscrupulous adventurer, and I hear that you have connected yourself with two swindlers, called Newman and Abrahams. But probably your narrow escape to-day will be a lesson to you.’

Horatio blushed deeply. To be lectured on morality by a man just out of prison was too much.

‘I always understood that you were clever,’ his Uncle went on ; ‘you seem, from all I hear, to have used such

cleverness as you possess in carrying out clumsy frauds. You have behaved very badly. You have got into debt, and abused your official position, and acted as tout for a low gambling house and a rascally money-lender. But you have unwittingly been useful to your country, and enabled us to run down a dangerous spy. I will not scold you or mystify you any longer. Here is the explanation of the whole matter. No doubt you have wondered what my business is, and how I get my living. You probably think I am a professional sharper and a thief. Plenty of people think so ; I took up that character for my own purposes. I am, or was—for I have now retired—a political agent, a detective if you like, though I have nothing to do with the police. It was my business to watch

anarchists and to circumvent spies. Persons of that kind are usually vicious, so the easiest way to get at them is through their vices. Consequently, I found it useful to assume the character of a sharper. It was an absolute necessity for me to be quite free in my movements, which made it impossible to have a fixed residence or to be hampered by family life. I had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of our friend Colonel Bloup after an abortive attempt to murder Sergeant Gripper, in order to obtain possession of one of the Colonel's inventions. The Sergeant had a narrow escape. A heavy weight was tied to his feet, and he was bound and thrown into the river. Fortunately the cord was rotten, or something of that sort, and the weight

broke loose, so the Sergeant just managed to keep himself up until a barge came by and rescued him.

‘We used the Sergeant very effectually as a ghost for some time afterwards, and gave his enemies severe nerve shakings. But to return to myself.

‘So long as nobody knew my real occupation my task was comparatively easy. I was acquainted with numerous swindlers and sharpers, and was supposed to be one of themselves. I was even considered to be not averse to a profitable job in the spy line, and have received considerable payments for quite imaginary drawings of guns and fortifications. There is not much scope for that kind of thing in England, for nobody really knows anything. If the intelligent foreigner wishes to see our

dockyards and arsenals, we open the doors wide and show him round, and invite him to dinner if he is at all an eminent person. The newspapers exclaim at such imprudence. We allow foreigners to fly their pigeons from our shores, and act generally in a guileless manner. I believe that matters are so prearranged that very little is really seen, and what is seen is a snare and a delusion, and that the pigeons seldom reach their native land. Foreign countries, on the contrary, adopt innumerable precautions, and go in for "No admittance," and "Trespassers will be prosecuted," and that kind of thing. I do not know which is the best plan ; probably it is a matter of national temperament.

‘ About three years ago I was engaged

on some important business in the spy-catching line ; unfortunately, I was too well known to some of the people engaged to be able to watch them successfully. For some reason they began to distrust me, and determined to put me out of the way. I decided to assist their desires, and concocted a little comedy for their amusement. I pretended to have been unlucky and to be hard up ; with the aid of some friendly foreign police I arranged the attempted jewel robbery and got sent to prison. The enemy thought that I had been most opportunely removed from their path. I wrote pathetic letters inviting some of them to visit me in my affliction, and we had solemn interviews through a grating in the presence of a warder. It was a most convenient plan,

because I had assured my personal safety, and was able to go about in a suitable disguise and carry on my work without their having the least suspicion of my presence. The only difficulty was Horatio. I somewhat hastily came to the conclusion that, as he had taken a good degree at Oxford, he would now be able to shift for himself. I sent him some money by Weston, which Weston appears to have annexed for his own use. I could not leave my work or run the risk of coming to England. My experience has taught me that the only way to keep a secret is to keep it to one's self, so I would not attempt to communicate with anybody.

‘ Weston saw me from time to time in the prison. He visited me to assure himself of my whereabouts ; I do not

flatter myself that he had any real sympathy with my supposed misfortune. It certainly did not occur to me that he would steal a few pounds intended for Horatio. Probably he considered that every little helps, and for his own purposes he wished Horatio to be hard up, and endeavoured to make use of him as a decoy for Newman and Abrahams.

‘ It was an unexpected piece of good fortune when Horatio was appointed to the Board of Explosives. Weston had little doubt that he would soon be able to obtain valuable secrets through him.

‘ A few weeks ago I finished the business which had kept me abroad so long, and received instructions to turn my attention to Weston himself.

‘ Horatio will perhaps be surprised to

hear that he had attracted notice for some time by his method of life and his connection with doubtful characters. It was decided to let matters take their course, in the belief that useful information would be gained. Colonel Bloup was perfectly aware that he was being watched, and acted accordingly.

‘ Weston, having obtained a sample of the Colonel’s new invention and sold it to his employers, thought it quite unnecessary to pay Horatio, who would probably lose his berth and be of no further use, but only an encumbrance and a danger. He arranged with Leben to dispose of Horatio as easily and safely as he could. Leben found his opportunity last night, as he supposed, and when I visited Barnes early this morning and saw Mr. Bernard’s letter, I

feared he had accomplished his purpose.

‘Yesterday evening I ran down Weston and Leben at Newman’s house. We had supper together, and I mixed a little soothing medicine with their wine to allay any nervous excitement they might feel. When they were under its peaceful influence I took the opportunity to examine their pockets, and relieved them of Horatio’s three thousand pounds ; I do not know how they felt when they woke, as I left them quietly sleeping in Newman’s supper-room, and went to bed at my hotel.

‘They are both wanted by the foreign police about a forgery business, so I have arranged for them to be arrested to-day, and they will probably be extradited very soon. As to you, Horatio,

you may keep your three thousand pounds. I do not pretend to be scrupulous ; we cannot give it back to the people who paid it, and you may as well have it as anybody else. We do not intend to tell your superiors exactly what has happened. Of course they will conclude that you stole the bottle, so it will be desirable to get you out of the way, which I propose to do by taking you over to Paris by the 2.45 train from Charing Cross.

‘ Mrs. Hopkins and the baby can follow us by the night mail, or tomorrow, and we will wait for them in Paris. Then we will all go to the Pyrenees for a few weeks and settle what to do next. I suppose I shall have to take care of you, as you seem quite incapable of taking care of your-

self. I do not want to be severe, but I must point out that you have been not only wicked, but silly, and in my opinion silliness is very often worse than wickedness.'

Horatio was completely crushed. Nobody was angry with him, but he somehow felt that his Uncle and the Colonel despised him. Bernard appeared to take the whole story as a matter of course; he had always regarded Horatio as the plaything of circumstances.

Women are curious creatures. Mrs. Hopkins had never really loved her husband until now. When she heard him blamed, she was indignant, and looked angrily about her. She put her arms round Horatio and covered him with kisses, and utterly refused to be

left behind until the next day. It was pointed out to her that the baby must be considered. She was not in a state to listen to reason. There was nothing to be done but to put off the journey until the evening, which would allow time for packing and other preparations. She and Horatio returned to Barnes together after a long discussion and a partial reconciliation with the Uncle.

‘If you had not found fault with Horatio,’ said Colonel Bloup, ‘very likely his wife would have scolded him. Now she will take his part. You know the old saying :

“ A dog, a woman, and a walnut-tree,
The more they are beaten the better they be.”

If you treat a woman well, she will

despise you ; if you jump on her, she will admire you. Women have no morality; it is all a question of persons. Tom may do a thing which Jack may not do, because Tom is nice and Jack is nasty.'

'I think it is the same with children,' said Bernard. 'You must keep them under if you want them to be manageable. They do not appreciate you if you are too good to them.'

'The children are rapidly getting the upper hand,' said the Colonel. 'A friend of mine sorrowfully remarked that he never had the wing of a chicken, for when he was young his parents ate the wings, and now his children eat them.'

'To eat the legs of a roast chicken is a sinful waste,' said Horatio's Uncle. 'Think how good they are devilled for breakfast.'

Bernard suggested that it would be well for Horatio to retire gracefully from the Office ; that he should write to Mr. Peasancues explaining how he had been ill, and required a holiday. He could send in his resignation later on, and could put it on the ground that, his Uncle having returned, it was unnecessary for him to continue his official work. It was not likely that the Office would trouble about him, provided that he was got rid of. The theft of the bottle would probably be unknown to anybody except the few persons who already knew about it. They would, of course, keep their knowledge to themselves.

‘ I think,’ said the Colonel, ‘ that a little change would be beneficial to me, so, if you have no objection, I should

like to accompany you, at any rate as far as Paris.'

'It will give me the greatest pleasure to have your society,' said Mr. Hopkins. 'Perhaps Mr. Bernard would come, too.'

'I could get away for a few days,' said Bernard, 'and should enjoy a short holiday.'

'Very well,' said the Colonel. 'I will telegraph to Dingymarsh for some clothes, and you can send a messenger to Poplar, unless you think it necessary to go yourself. We must pass the afternoon somehow. Shall we go down to the billiard-room?'

As they crossed the hall of the hotel, their attention was attracted to an enormous box which several porters were carrying in from a four-wheel cab.

It was even larger and heavier than the formidable American trunk, and they looked to see who could be the owner of such a gigantic encumbrance.

He was a portly person, attired in a travelling costume of startling grandeur. A massive gold chain with numerous seals stretched itself across his ample white waistcoat ; over his arm he carried a fur-trimmed coat ; his fat fingers were adorned with many rings ; in his scarf-pin flashed a large diamond. Mr. Hopkins recognised Mr. Moses Abrahams, alias Morrison and Co.

At length the box was deposited in the luggage-room, and Mr. Abrahams in a loud and commanding voice announced his intention of reposing himself for some hours at the hotel, and honouring it with his patronage at

dinner, previous to his departure for the Continent by the night-mail.

He was liberal in his tips to the porters who had groaned under the weight of his Noah's ark ; then he subsided into an armchair in the hall, and lit a cigar, and called for a cooling drink.

Mr. Hopkins showed a morbid and feminine curiosity as to the box. He surveyed it with admiration as it blocked up a large space in the luggage-room, and looked to see if it had any label which might indicate its destination. There was no label, but painted in large letters on the top was the name of its proprietor, ' Monsieur le Baron Denber Zenski.' Apparently Mr. Abrahams had thought fit to confer upon himself a title, and to join the ranks of the aristocracy.

Mr. Hopkins knew a great deal about Abrahams. Professional instinct, which he could not immediately put aside, set his mind to work upon Abrahams' plans and movements. Perhaps he had made his fortune and retired from business ; perhaps he intended to transfer his operations to some new scene ; perhaps circumstances had occurred which made it desirable for him to effect a change of domicile. In any case, it seemed likely that the box contained the whole or part of the stock-in-trade of Morrison and Co.

It would certainly be interesting, and might be useful, to inspect its contents. To do so would require keys and tools. It was hardly a task which could be accomplished in the hotel ; the most suitable time for such an investigation

would be on the journey from London to Dover. In the course of his business career Mr. Hopkins had examined much luggage in transit, and had gathered a great deal of valuable information from his researches.

Colonel Bloup was amused at this display of curiosity.

In the billiard-room they discovered Weston and Leben playing each other in a languid manner. They looked very sleepy and coppery. Mr. Ephraim Newman was obligingly marking their game, and favouring them with much unwelcome advice. He quickly perceived the presence of Mr. Hopkins, and remembered having seen the Colonel and Bernard at his house of entertainment. He had distrusted Bernard, and had solemnly rebuked Horatio for bring-

ing him an unprofitable and possibly dangerous client.

‘Ah! it is my excellent friend, Mr. Hopkins,’ he said. ‘I also have the honour to be slightly acquainted with your companions,’ he added, smiling blandly. ‘It is the dull season, business is very slack, so we are about to amuse ourselves by a little tour on the Continent; we go by the night-mail.’

‘That is curious,’ said Mr. Hopkins, ‘as we are also travelling by the same route. My nephew and his family will join us this evening.’

Leben made an almost imperceptible movement as he heard this announcement. Weston showed no sign of embarrassment.

‘Ah, indeed!’ said Newman, ‘we shall be quite a party. My friend, the Baron

Denber Zenski, whom you perhaps know as head of the firm of Morrison and Co., intends to accompany us. We all need a little relaxation from our affairs at this season.'

'He is sitting in the hall,' said Mr. Hopkins. 'He has just arrived with an enormous box.'

'Yes,' said Newman; 'he likes to travel with a large, heavy trunk, which cannot be stolen. One's luggage is so unsafe on foreign railways. For myself, I take only a small valise, which I can carry in my hand; but our friend requires an extensive wardrobe, as he is acquainted with many important personages, and is obliged to attend grand functions. We, simple gentlemen, can do with less luggage.'

'I hope your nephew is well,' said

Weston. 'I have not seen him lately, he has become so domesticated.'

'He is very well, thank you,' said Mr. Hopkins. 'He and his wife lunched with us here, and have gone home to pack up.'

Leben could not conceal his surprise. He had completely changed his appearance. He was smartly dressed and clean shaven ; his hair was close cropped, and stood up in the Belgian fashion. Of course, he and Weston knew perfectly well that Horatio's Uncle had drugged them and ransacked their pockets on the previous evening, but they had felt sure that Horatio was safely disposed of.

Leben began to wonder whether he could have operated on the wrong person. He pulled himself together, and went

on with his game. It would not be wise to ask questions. His scheme had certainly miscarried in some way which he could not at present understand.

The Colonel began a game with Mr. Hopkins at the other end of the room. They were both good players, but the Colonel seemed to be a regular professional. He soon attracted spectators, and astonished them all by his performance on a rather inferior table.

Mr. Hopkins was hardly in his usual form. His mind was diverted from the game by consideration of the probable intentions of Weston and his friends. The police were keeping an eye on Weston and Leben, but it was quite possible that they might be allowed to go abroad and spare the trouble of an extradition.

Whether the journey of Newman and Abrahams was really a holiday tour, or a flight from justice, he could not at present determine. So far as he knew, both of them had avoided as far as possible any breaches of the criminal law. Newman's establishment was of course illegal, but such places are not often interfered with, except on the complaints of neighbours or other private persons.

Money-lending is a risky business, and though Abrahams might be as exacting as others in that occupation, there was no reason to suppose that he had done anything likely to get him into trouble with the police. The most probable explanation seemed to be that all the four were about to undertake a joint stroke of business on the Continent.

He would have to be careful, for Weston and Leben would stick at nothing to 'get their own back,' for his treatment of them yesterday.

VI.

THE Colonel suggested a short stroll before dinner. It was not quite so warm as in the morning, and a little fresh air would be pleasant.

They found the Baron still sitting in the hall. He had moved into a corner, and was engaged in a close conversation with Miss Olroyd of the Dingy-marsh Post-Office.

The Colonel pointed her out to Mr. Hopkins. What possible connection could there be between her and Abrahams?

The curiosity of the Colonel was



excited. On the pavement outside the hotel stood the despised Tommy, looking angry and dejected. He was dressed in his telegraph messenger's uniform, and had apparently deserted his duties to follow the lady of his affections. It was not likely that she would have selected him as an escort, so that his presence was probably due to jealousy and suspicion. The Colonel was about to speak to him, when Mr. Hopkins trod hard on his toes.

‘Do not take any notice,’ he said ; ‘we must find out the purpose of all these manœuvres.’

How this was to be accomplished by a walk round St. James's Park the Colonel did not perceive, but he had unlimited confidence in Mr. Hopkins, who had so promptly connected Tommy

with the presence of Miss Olroyd at the hotel.

‘This is another nice little story,’ said Mr. Hopkins. ‘Miss Olroyd, I know, is your telegraph clerk at Dingymarsh. She has been made use of to give information as to your telegrams and correspondence. The boy thinks he is in love with her. She is twice his age, and a bad-tempered, vulgar young woman. He does not mind that ; he has been shut up with her for hours every day. She has probably encouraged him in spite of a great deal of snubbing. A woman cannot resist admiration ; women are steeped in vanity. She has amused herself by encouraging this silly boy, and then snubbing him. A woman of that kind is essentially cruel ; his sufferings are an evidence of her power.



At present he thinks she is going to run away with somebody else. He has got a pistol in his pocket, and will very likely take a shot at her unless he prefers Abrahams as a bigger target.'

'How do you know he has got a pistol?' said the Colonel.

'In my profession,' said Mr. Hopkins, 'I have had to keep a constant lookout for pistols, and I have learned to know the sort of fold a pistol makes in a breast-pocket. Some people carry daggers. Weston has a stiletto hidden in the left leg of his trousers. If one knows where people carry their arms, one has time to prepare for emergencies.'

Mr. Hopkins had bought a bun with which he fed the ducks in the ornamental water. He was able to enjoy

this innocent pleasure as if there were no evil-doers and no weapons in the world.

‘ I thought you had arranged for the arrest of Leben and Weston,’ said the Colonel.

‘ Yes, I had done so,’ said Mr. Hopkins ; ‘ but if they seem likely to go to the country which wants them of their own accord, the police will save themselves trouble by allowing them to do so. We shall see to-night how matters turn out. I shall probably take an opportunity of examining Abrahams’ box while it is in the train. It is true that I have retired, but I should like to see this business through, and as I know everybody, I do not suppose that any obstacles will be put in my way. We will look in at Charing Cross and get them to reserve

a carriage for us, and at the same time I will have a little conversation with the authorities as to the box.'

Mr. Hopkins was evidently well known at the station. He was informed that the mail-train would be divided that evening, as the traffic was likely to be unusually heavy; the Charing Cross portion would run direct to Dover without going into Cannon Street; a special van should be provided for Mr. Hopkins and the box.

At the Cosmopolitan they found the unhappy Tommy still keeping guard over the entrance.

'He is getting hungry,' said Mr. Hopkins. 'It is a pity we cannot invite him to dinner. I wonder whether hunger will get the better of love.'

'I should say that he is suffering

from wounded pride,' said Bernard. 'Boys of that sort are exceedingly sensitive if their dignity is attacked.'

'That is true,' said Mr. Hopkins; 'but at his age hunger is a powerful motive. I wish we could make him give up the pistol. He is decidedly dangerous, as he is not likely to shoot straight, and there is no saying who may be hit.'

'Why not get the police to move him on?' suggested the Colonel.

'We might do that,' said Mr. Hopkins; 'but he is rather necessary to my plans. If we leave him alone he is nearly sure to cause a commotion, which will most likely reveal much that I want to know.'

Horatio and his wife, with the baby and a nurse, had arrived. Mr. Hopkins

proposed to ask Abrahams and his companions to join them at dinner. Horatio objected very strongly to eat and drink with the men who had attempted to murder him, but his Uncle told him not to be a fool, so he was obliged to give way.

The whole party sat down together not without some awkwardness. Weston and Leben were silent and subdued; Newman and Abrahams made themselves agreeable according to their own ideas. Miss Olroyd sat next to Bernard, who amused himself by teasing her in a quiet way. He pretended to think that she was a society lady, and talked about people and things quite unknown to her, but as to which she did not wish to appear ignorant. She got rather mixed up with the various dishes, and

drank more champagne than was good for her. She confided to Bernard that she was going abroad to be married to a rich Marquis who had fallen in love with her photograph. Bernard congratulated her and the lucky Marquis, and remarked that some people were always too late, himself for instance. This soothing compliment was very gratifying to Miss Olroyd, ever ready to be admired. She thought that, if anything should go wrong with the Marquis, it might be as well to have a second string. Though she had so far regarded Bernard as a most disagreeable and stuck-up young man, she now unbent, and intimated that if he had arrived sooner on the scene there was no saying what might have happened.

Outside, her humble follower was in a sad state. He had worked himself up into a morbid excitement. For months he had hoped and suffered. At the beginning Miss Olroyd had treated him as a small boy. Before other people she snubbed him ; when they were alone she talked to him and rather encouraged him. She sent him on her private errands, and rewarded him with sweets, and lent him her penny novelettes, and condescended to discuss with him the heroes and heroines of those fantastic tales. She let him give her flowers and other small presents. He had taken great trouble to please her. He brushed his hair, washed his hands, left off biting his nails, and used cosmetics to produce a moustache and give him a manly appearance. When she was

out of temper he received her rebukes with proper humility and meekness. He had made up quite a little romance in his own weak head. In the course of time she would yield to his devotion ; then they would be married. He was too much alone ; he lived in this dream. During his solitary walks with his messages he made up his plans, and inflamed his imagination with thoughts of future happiness. He would work hard to get on, so as to make a comfortable home for her. He was naturally indolent ; he hated exertion, and would have liked to lie on his back and contemplate the passing clouds. She had certainly improved him ; she had given him an incentive to action, and cured him of bad habits. For the last few weeks she had treated him very hardly. She

seldom spoke to him, and when she did notice him, she only scolded him.

Then she had suddenly announced her intention of going away. He did venture to ask where she was going, but she told him to mind his own business. He felt sure that she was about to bestow herself on somebody else. His dream would vanish; he could not let her go like that. When he saw her on her way to the station, he left his work and followed her. He had a few shillings in his pocket, enough to carry him to London.

She had taken a cab at Fenchurch Street, and he had heard her tell the driver to go to the Cosmopolitan Hotel; so he followed her there on foot, and kept watch to see where she would go next. He had not seen her arrive at

the hotel ; a sort of instinct told him that she was there. He was afraid to go inside, though he might easily have invented an excuse for doing so. The grandeur of the place and the majesty of the hall porter overawed him. He posted himself outside, and kept guard on the entrance. He attracted attention by standing there so long ; once or twice a policeman made him move on. He walked up and down, sometimes on the opposite side of the street.

The telegraph - boys of the district noticed him, and were surprised at his invasion of their domain. They talked to him, and cheeked him, and wanted to fight him. He was not given to fighting at any time, and could not engage in hostilities just then. He

caught a boy who was about to deliver a message at the hotel, and asked him to report as to Miss Olroyd's presence. The boy was interested, and as he delivered his message at the hotel office had ample opportunity to see Abrahams and Miss Olroyd, who were sitting in the hall. He informed Tommy that 'the Judy was in there with a fat old bloke in a white waistcoat.'

This knowledge was satisfactory, and Tommy patiently continued his watch. He began to feel hungry. A costermonger passed with fruit on a truck. Tommy bought some greengages, with which he hoped to sustain nature under his trials. Greengages are not a nourishing diet, and his feelings became more and more exasperated. He had read penny dreadfuls, like most boys of his

class, and had bought a revolver, which he carried about in his pocket. Hitherto he had only used it to shoot at sparrows, with little success. Hunger and jealousy and wounded pride are dangerous stimulants; he began to consider that the 'fat old bloke in the white waist-coat' would be easier to hit than a sparrow.

At last his patience was rewarded. He saw Colonel Bloup and the others come out and walk towards Charing Cross. A four-wheeler was called, and Abrahams' box with much labour was hoisted upon it, and other luggage was packed inside as well as on the roof.

Abrahams himself appeared, accompanied by Miss Olroyd, and proceeded on foot towards the station.

Tommy followed them unobserved.

It would be awkward to shoot at Abrahams in the crowded street; he would be caught, and he did not wish to be hung. He must take precautions to make good his escape. He managed to convince himself that, if Abrahams were out of the way, Miss Olroyd would return to Dingymarsh. How could she like such a fat ugly man? Probably he was rich, and could give her a luxurious life. Tommy followed them to the booking-office, and heard them ask for tickets to Paris. He had only a shilling and a few pence left; it was obvious that he could not go much further.

The platform was crowded with passengers and luggage. Abrahams had to pay a heavy excess for his box, which was wheeled away and deposited in a van next the gate.

Horatio perceived Sir Marmaduke, who had come to see Plantagenet off to Bow-Wow-Wow. Mr. Peasancues was also there. He had been to a meeting at Exeter Hall in favour of a movement for distributing tracts in North China. Sergeant and Mrs. Gripper had come up from Woolwich, and were surprised to meet their master.

Horatio had to explain to his superiors why he was still alive. He told them that he had suffered from the heat, and had been taken ill while on his way to see Bernard. A stupid local doctor had given him up for dead, and the newspaper reporters had exaggerated matters as usual. Sir Marmaduke and Mr. Peasancues received these explanations with some stiffness. Horatio added that his Uncle, who had just returned

from abroad, was taking him and his family for a short holiday, which he hoped would restore him to health. He trusted that his absence would not cause any inconvenience at the Office.

Mr. Peasancues was about to deliver a diplomatic and ponderous reply, when the noise of a pistol-shot resounded through the station. In an instant everything was in confusion. Women screamed, and people ran here and there to discover what had happened. The Baron Denber Zenski sat down on the platform, and proclaimed in a loud voice that he was killed. He had been murdered, and would bring an action for damages against the railway company, and the Government, and everybody else. They should all be hung. Nobody seemed to have seen the murderer. He

had escaped in the crowd, but he could not be far off. In fact, he was close by. When the exasperated Tommy saw Miss Olroyd and Abrahams approach the platform barrier, he knew that his time had come. He would not be allowed to pass without a ticket, and she would be carried away from him for ever.

He screwed up his courage, and pulled out his revolver, and took a shot at Abrahams at ten yards' distance ; but as he fired his wrist was jerked up, and the bullet lodged in the woodwork of the bookstall. He felt himself seized in an iron grip, a rug was thrown over his head, and he was carried through the barrier, thrown into the special van with Abrahams' box, and locked in. His pistol had been taken away from him. He could only sit there in the dark, and

wonder what would happen next. He had sense enough not to make a noise. Mr. Hopkins, having rescued Tommy from the consequences of his violence, set himself to work to soothe the public. He produced the revolver, which he pretended was his own. He had stupidly put it loaded into his pocket. Something had jerked the trigger, and it had gone off. Fortunately no harm was done.

Abrahams was lifted on to his feet, and after some difficulty was persuaded that he was unhurt. There was no time for explanations, as the train was about to start. Mr. Hopkins gave the station authorities his name and address, and offered to leave five pounds, if they wished to have him fined for carrying loaded firearms on their

premises ; but of course, knowing who he was, they acted accordingly, and let him go on his journey without more trouble.

Horatio and his family got into one compartment with Mr. Hopkins ; Abrahams and his party, with the Colonel and Bernard, filled up another.

Sergeant Gripper was smuggled into the van with Tommy and the box, and Mrs. Gripper had to return alone to Dingymarsh. Sir Marmaduke and Mr. Peasancues took a tender farewell of Plantagenet. ‘A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind ;’ they were so pleased at their skill in disposing of him that Sir Marmaduke invited Mr. Peasancues to his club, where that worthy man played whist far into the night, and was obliged to take a cab to Clapham, having

missed the last train. Mr. Peasancues had lapsed terribly ; perhaps it was due to a reaction after Exeter Hall. He had drunk whisky-and-seltzer, and won ten pounds at cards. Mrs. Peasancues was alarmed at his absence, and asked questions ; but he was master of his own house and did not condescend to give an account of his doings, except that he talked about urgent Government business and the importance of his own services.

It is always difficult for the South-Eastern to get their enormous traffic over the narrow line in and out of London. The mail-train was stopped by signal at London Bridge. The baby did not approve of a night-journey, and began to be noisy, and disturbed Mr. Hopkins. He said that he would join Abrahams' party, and got out ; in-

stead of seeking the comfort of a first-class carriage, he removed himself to the van which contained Sergeant Gripper, Tommy, and the box.

He produced some matches, lit a lantern, and prepared to operate on the box with the assistance of the Sergeant. Tommy looked on with interest. They had no leisure to attend to him just then. The box had two locks, which were both of simple construction, and offered little or no opposition to the keys with which Mr. Hopkins had provided himself. In a few minutes the Sergeant was able to raise the lid and expose to view the contents. At the top was a collection of clothing of various kinds, evidently for the use of Abrahams on his travels. This had to be carefully removed and placed on the floor of the

van. Tommy, whose curiosity had been thoroughly roused, willingly helped in the work.

Underneath the clothes were two heavy iron boxes, which required all the available strength to lift them out. Their locks yielded to Mr. Hopkins' keys without much difficulty. They were found to contain a very considerable sum of money, all in gold, and a number of papers carefully tied up and docketed.

Mr. Hopkins quickly removed the papers, and studied them in the flickering light of the lantern. Haste was necessary, as the box must be repacked before the train arrived at Dover.

Most of the papers were bills and other documents connected with the business of Morrison and Co.; there were also a number of letters, and to

these Mr. Hopkins turned his attention. He was accustomed to making out the drift of a disjointed correspondence, and did not require much time to discover the objects of Abrahams' journey.

It appeared that he had arranged with a ruined French Marquis to provide him with a rich wife in consideration of a commission. Miss Olroyd was to personate the heiress, and the Marquis was to pay two hundred pounds for the honour of an introduction to her. She, on the other hand, had been persuaded that the Marquis had been so smitten by her photograph that he had induced Abrahams to enable him to obtain the original, upon whom he desired to bestow his hand, his heart, and his worldly goods.

Abrahams intended to bring about this ill-assorted marriage, and to pocket his two hundred pounds and whatever else he could get.

The papers also revealed certain blackmailing operations in which Newman and Weston were involved.

Mr. Hopkins replaced the papers and repacked the box without saying a word. As he locked it up, the train was running through Ashford, so he still had half an hour to mature his plans.

He had no particular desire to save Miss Olroyd from the consequences of her own vanity. He would warn the police as to the blackmailing, but, of course, it was for the people involved to take care of themselves. There did not seem to be any good reason why he should not pursue his journey to the

Pyrenees, and leave all these people to carry out their designs in peace.

Then his eye fell on Tommy ; something must be done with him. He could be sent back to London by the up-mail, and return to Dingymarsh, and settle his differences with the postal authorities as best he could. But Mr. Hopkins, in spite of his low estimate of human nature and his habitual cynicism, was a man of impulse. He had taken a fancy to Tommy. There must be something in a boy who could act as he had done, however foolish he might be.

Mr. Hopkins was so utterly incapable of falling in love himself that he was refreshed by this ingenuous captivation.

Tommy had never seen so much gold before, and wondered why Mr. Hopkins had not annexed it. He did not under-

stand what the object of searching the box could be. Mr. Hopkins had pity on him, and explained in a few words the scheme in which Miss Olroyd was involved.

‘I think,’ he added, ‘that you are well rid of her. She is a silly fool, and whatever happens will serve her right. She has played about with you. There are plenty of other women in the world, and one woman is just as good or as bad as another.’

Tommy could not quite take this view of the matter, though he was indignant at Miss Olroyd’s treatment of him, and began to see that he had acted in an idiotic manner.

‘If you like,’ continued Mr. Hopkins, ‘I will take you on with me and see what I can do for you. If so, we must

wrap you up in a great-coat until we can get you a change of clothes ; your uniform will make you so conspicuous.'

Tommy did not much care what he did. He was feeling the pangs of hunger in spite of the greengages, and his main desire at present was to get something to eat. A boy's natural love of adventure made him quite ready to accompany Mr. Hopkins on his travels.

The train arrived at Dover. Mr. Hopkins let out himself and his companions on the side away from the platform. He wrapped up Tommy in a large coat, and they went on board the Calais boat, where they met all the others.

The Colonel was in great good humour. After some persuasion he had induced Bernard to play whist with

.

himself for a partner against Newman and Abrahams, and had relieved the latter of twenty pounds on the journey. Bernard was an indifferent player, but the Colonel seemed to have an almost supernatural knowledge of where every card was, and extraordinary luck, so much so that Weston privately asked him how it was done.

It was blowing rather hard, and the sea was rough. The Baron Denber Zenski had engaged a private cabin in which he installed himself and prepared to be seasick. Newman was a bad sailer, and retired into the general cabin. The boat pitched considerably, and most of the passengers were ill.

Tommy was provided with sandwiches and pale ale, which he eagerly absorbed. The Colonel established himself in the

smoking-room, where he gave a display of card tricks for the edification of Weston and Leben. He was able to deal himself almost any hand that he chose, which perhaps accounted for his success at whist in the train.

In spite of his interest in the performance, Weston was seized with seasickness. Leben was inclined to laugh at him.

‘There is nothing to laugh at,’ said the Colonel. ‘Seasickness is a troublesome malady, and a fortune awaits whoever can discover a cure. I have spent some time in experimenting on the subject, without much success so far. I believe that cocaine is the best preventive for short trips, but it upsets the inside unless used in very small quantities. We are all liable to become

ridiculous when we get out of our own sphere. Take a sailor and put him on a horse, and you will see what an exhibition he will generally make. Take a crack jockey and put him on a Channel boat : the chances are he will be helplessly seasick. Put a first-class billiard-player in a football team, or make the footballer play billiards—in fact, take anybody out of his element—and he will be ridiculous.’

This valuable discourse reached Tommy, who arrived on the scene accompanied by Mr. Hopkins. He was wrapped up in an ulster several inches too long for him, and enjoyed the fresh breeze and the lively tossing of the boat. Fortified with twelve sandwiches, he had regained his spirits, and was looking forward eagerly to seeing

a new country and finding a more exciting mode of life. As the steamer approached Calais there was the usual crowd of passengers collecting their hand luggage, and preparing to land quickly and get the best seats in the train. Abrahams came out from his cabin looking as if he had an attack of jaundice. He was joined by Newman, Weston, and Leben, and they stood together comparing notes as to the unpleasantness of the crossing.

As they were about to land, four Frenchmen approached them, each one selecting his man, and keeping close to him.

Miss Olroyd came up from the ladies' cabin in an untidy and dishevelled condition. It was to be hoped that the infatuated Marquis would not see her

until she had time to recover from the effects of the voyage. Her arrival seemed to puzzle the four Frenchmen, who, however, stuck close to Abrahams and his friends as the whole party landed. They passed into the Customs room, where their small things were examined with unusual promptitude, and crossed a waiting-room to reach the train, but the door leading to the platform was locked. An official appeared, and invited them into an inner room.

‘Par ici, messieurs, pour Paris,’ he said.

The unsuspecting travellers went through the door, which was at once shut and locked. In the inner room were the four Frenchmen and some police in uniform. Messrs. Abrahams, Newman, Weston, and Leben were promptly arrested, Weston and Leben

on a charge of uttering forged cheques, Abrahams and Newman for attempting to defraud François Désiré Hippolyte Thomas, Marquis de Folleville.

Miss Olroyd, not understanding a word of French, could not make out what was happening. Before she had time to inquire, she was put out on to the platform, and left to her own devices.

She walked along the train looking for the Colonel and his party, who might be able to explain matters. She soon found Horatio and his family in a *coupé toilette*, which they had reserved for the journey to Paris. Mr. Hopkins was standing at the door smoking a cigar.

‘Where are your friends?’ he said. ‘They will miss the train if they are not quick.’

‘They are in a waiting-room with a lot of men,’ said Miss Olroyd. ‘There is some bother, and I was made to go out on the platform.’

Mr. Hopkins took her aside, and in a few words explained the scheme in which Abrahams and Newman were involved, and the character of Weston and Leben.

‘You have had a lucky escape,’ he added ; ‘but what will you do now ? I should advise you to go home, and to be more careful in future.’

Miss Olroyd was much agitated. She did not feel equal to crossing the Channel by herself, she had suffered so much on the way over. It was dreadful to think of going through such a voyage again. Perhaps Mr. Bernard would escort her home.

‘ We will ask him,’ said Mr. Hopkins, with a smile.

Bernard and the Colonel and Tommy were in a smoking carriage, and were preparing to get some sleep.

Mr. Hopkins explained the critical situation of Miss Olroyd, and appealed to the gallantry of Bernard to rescue a lady in distress.

Bernard’s face was a study ; horror and disgust produced an expression of countenance by no means complimentary to the fair petitioner. He totally refused to move, and in language much more forcible than polite announced that she could go to Jericho, or even to a warmer place, before he would do anything to help her.

Miss Olroyd melted into tears ; she could not be left there at Calais by herself.

Then the faithful Tommy emerged from his ulster, and descended on to the platform.

‘Miss Olroyd—Millicent—Millie!’ he said with increasing boldness, ‘trust to me; I will take care of you.’

She was unnerved and upset and startled at his sudden appearance; she had no idea that Tommy was not safely in bed at Dingymarsh. In her distress any kind of male escort would be a protection. She hugged Tommy and called him by endearing names, to the amusement of the travelling public and his own confusion.

‘En voiture pour Paris!’ shouted the guard. The whistle blew; Mr. Hopkins thrust five pounds into Tommy’s hand, and told him to return to London at once by the 1.30 boat; then he jumped

into the already moving train, and was carried away into the darkness.

* * * * *

The gossips of Dingymarsh did not fail to remark the simultaneous disappearance of Miss Olroyd and Tommy. It was true that they did not return together. Tommy had reappeared at the post-office after an absence of thirty-six hours, and had given unsatisfactory and contradictory accounts of his conduct, so much so that he was threatened with dismissal; but this stringent measure was rendered unnecessary by his receiving an appointment at the General Post-Office, on condition of his passing an examination, which he somehow managed to do.

Miss Olroyd did not remain long at Dingymarsh ; she transferred her at-

tractions and her services to the buffet of the Cosmopolitan Hotel, where she dispensed light luncheons and refreshing drinks to a new set of admirers, who could not, however, succeed in making much way in her favour.

She was seen one Sunday on a Richmond omnibus, escorted by Tommy, and that was the latest information which Dingymarsh had obtained about her.

Horatio had sent his letter of resignation to Mr. Peasancues, and, freed from material cares, was able to enjoy his life once more. In the intervals of spoiling his little daughter he was producing a learned treatise on Greek lyrics.

THE END.



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